

J. Graves

FIRST THINGS FIRST

I HAVE a life with CHRIST to live,
But, ere I live it, must I wait
Till learning can clear answer give
Of this and that book's date?

I have a life in CHRIST to live,
I have a death in CHRIST to die;
And must I wait till science give
All doubts a full reply?

Nay, rather, while the sea of doubt
Is raging wildly round about,
Questioning of life and death and sin,
Let me but creep within
Thy fold, O CHRIST, and at thy feet
Take but the lowest seat,
And hear Thine awful voice repeat,
In gentlest accents, heavenly sweet :
"Come unto Me, and rest ;
Believe Me, and be blest."

J. C. SHARP.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Addresses to Young Men

BY THE

REV. GEORGE JACKSON, B.A.

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ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα.—1 COR. xii. 31.

TO
MY MOTHER



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE sermons contained in this volume have all been preached in the course of the writer's ordinary ministry, and, with one or two exceptions, during the last twelve months. They have been re-written from the original notes, but both in form and substance they remain practically the same as when first delivered.

In making this selection for the press, the aim of the writer has been to illustrate and emphasize the truth suggested by the title of the book. If he has succeeded in this, he will be the more readily pardoned the occasional repetition of ideas, which is the almost inevitable consequence.

How much, and to how many, he is indebted, probably no busy preacher can tell ; certainly the writer cannot. He has gleaned in many fields and always with one end in view. Some acknowledgment of his many obligations he has sought

to make in the footnotes attached to these pages ; and with this he must be content.

The address entitled "The Unanswerable Argument for Christianity" is reprinted from the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (January 1894), by kind permission of Rev. C. H. Kelly. With this exception all the addresses appear now for the first time.

EDINBURGH, 19th September 1894.

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“SELF-REVERENCE, SELF-KNOWLEDGE,
SELF-CONTROL”

"Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost?"
—1 COR. vi. 19.

"Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." LUKE v. 8.

"I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage."—1 COR. ix. 27.

"Yield yourselves unto God."—ROM. vi. 13.

I

"SELF-REVERENCE, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, SELF-CONTROL"

"**K** NOW ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost?"—that is self-reverence. "Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord"—that is self-knowledge. "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage"—that is self-control. "Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control; these three alone," says Tennyson, "lead life to sovereign power." But is it so? "These three *alone*"—are these the only saviours that man needs? Nay, verily; even this threefold cord, strong as it is, will snap if you do not weave into its twisted strands another and a stronger. Hence my fourth text: "Yield yourselves unto God." It is not enough that life be self-controlled; it must be Christ-controlled. "Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control"—we need them all; not one ally can be spared in the deadly war of Sense with Soul;

but our life will never reach that "sovereign power" of which the poet sings, till in the midst of the throne Christ sits as king.

Let us consider these three virtues, therefore, and see how they stand related to Jesus Christ. And for convenience' sake I begin with—

I. *Self-knowledge*.—"Know thyself," said the ancient Greek oracle; and if, as Pope has told us, "the proper study of mankind is man," then each man should begin with himself.

Is it altogether superfluous to urge the importance of a knowledge of one's *physical* self? Despite all that the schoolmaster and the popular scientific and health lecturer have done, the amount of mischief which is directly traceable to ignorance— and which is therefore preventible— can hardly be over-estimated. I am not of those who claim for physical science the first place in our studies; yet surely prudence and common sense urge the importance of at least an elementary knowledge of the laws of our physical well-being. How is the human machine to be kept in proper working order if we who have, so to speak, the "tending" of it are wholly ignorant of its construction? The worst ills of life spring from causes deeper than ignorance; they lie beyond the reach of the schoolmaster; nevertheless, let him do his perfect work, and society will soon be a different thing from what we see it to-day.

There is another side to this subject, which,

though it belongs to those who are fathers and mothers rather than to the young men to whom these words are specially addressed, I cannot pass over in silence. I wish I dare say all that it is in my heart to say, all that ought to be said, and to be said, too, in the plainest possible speech ; yes, and that would be said, if it were not that we are smothered by false conventionalities. But I deliberately charge it against you fathers and mothers that you are sending your sons and daughters out into the world in utter ignorance of what it is your solemn and bounden duty to speak to them of. I know what seals your lips ; it is a feeling of modesty, of delicacy ; and besides, will they not find out these things soon enough for themselves ? It is modesty false as it is cruel. "Find out for themselves" ? Yes, indeed they will ; and the devil himself mayhap will be their teacher, and the truth never learnt from the lips of love will enter by the door of sin and shame. That is the sad dumb tragedy of many a home ; that is why the lines have come so soon in the mother's face, and the father's back is bowed while he is yet young.

But this is only one form of self-knowledge. Man possesses a moral as well as a physical self. If ignorance there means disaster, not less so does it here. There is a famous picture by a German artist¹ which represents Satan playing a game of chess with man for his soul. We are all playing

¹ Retzsch.

that game ; if we do not know the rules of the game we shall be checkmated speedily and without pity. " Know thyself " ; keep a strict watch upon yourself ; make a study of yourself. Learn what are the forces at your command ; know where you are weak and where you are strong. The general who goes into battle ignorant of the army at his back does but court defeat. Remember we are engaged in a warfare from which there is no escape. The adversary before us is as pitiless as he is powerful. It will need all our wit and resource if we are not to be left beaten upon the battlefield ; and one of the first conditions of successful conflict is a true self-knowledge.

Now the truest and highest self-knowledge is only to be learned from Jesus Christ. Do not say that is a merely arbitrary statement ; it can justify itself at the bar of reason. For consider, how is a man to know himself intellectually ? Can he do so if he company all his days with country yokels ? If he would learn the cubits of his mental stature must he not measure himself, not with those who are, intellectually, his inferiors, not even with his equals, but with the intellectual giants of our race ? Only so will he learn the truth about himself. Not otherwise is it in the moral and spiritual world. We must come into the presence of the Ideal Man and judge ourselves by Him. In the Tower of London are kept the standard weights and measures by which the pound-weight and the yard-stick of every village

shopkeeper must be tested. That is what Christ is for us in the world of moral life. Look at Simon Peter in the presence of Jesus. What Peter's estimate of himself had been before that day I do not know ; complacent enough in all probability. But when in the little fishing coble there flashed into his soul one sudden self-revealing ray from the presence of Christ, all the old self-satisfaction shrivelled into nothingness, and he "fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." That was a memorable day in the life of Peter when Jesus "looked *into*"¹ His disciple, and saw Cephas, the man of rock, beneath the fluid, unstable Peter. But it was a day no less memorable when Peter looked into himself, and saw himself as with Christ's own eyes ; the disciple then had become an apostle in the making. Self-knowledge is always best learned at the feet of Jesus.

II. *Self-reverence*.—The importance of self-reverence may be seen in a moment if we consider what happens when it is lost. Why is it that the path back to a better life is for some so hard to tread ? What is it makes even their best friends shake their heads and lose heart ? It is not that they are sinners above all the rest ; but they have begun to despair of themselves ; they have lost faith in themselves ; hope is gone, self-reverence, self-respect, dead. "Contempt from those about us is hard to bear, but God help the poor wretch

¹ John i. 42 ἐμβλέψας.

who contemns himself.”¹ You remember poor Guinevere’s sad wail—

“O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls,
Meek maidens, from the voices crying ‘shame.’
I must not scorn myself.”

It is from that scorn of self that, in Victor Hugo’s great masterpiece, the soul of Jean Valjean is saved by the love of the saintly bishop. And if our love can thus heal of self-despisings, if it can “wipe off the soiling of despair,” to such a love all things are possible; if it cannot, I know not if there is anything that it can do. For the scorn of self is the death of hope.

And yet, it may be urged, what is this scorn of self but the outcome of that knowledge of self of which we have just been speaking? What shred of self-reverence can still cling to the man whose eyes have once looked into the whited sepulchre of his own sinful life? How should he but loathe and despise himself? And if our knowledge of self be won anywhere save at the feet of Christ, I do not wonder if it issue not in self-reverence but in self-despair. Only He can stand over us as we lie in the depths of our self-abasement and say, as He did to Peter, “Fear not.” But He can, and He does.

Have we ever pondered this wonderful fact? Christ knew what was in man, and yet He never lost His reverence for man. Hold Him for what

¹ Mark Rutherford.

we will, human or Divine, none has ever read the human heart as He read it. He knew the hellish possibilities that slumbered in its dark depths; knew, too, how they could burst forth in horrid shapes of murderous hate and blood. And yet He revered man, and caused him to be revered, as none other ever did. What to others was only a ruin, was to Him at least ruined magnificence. He looked on human nature not as one that gazes on some still lake and thinks only of the foul creeping things that nestle in its slimy depths; but rather as one who sees how in its quiet bosom it may bear, as in a mirror, the fair image of the over-arching sky. "If there be a devil in man, there is an angel too"; Christ never missed the angel. He saw the possible saint even in the actual devil. Therefore in His eyes every human life was sacred—the life of the little child, the fallen woman, the outcast publican.

This is the lesson Christ will teach me if I come to Him. I, am I made in the image and likeness of God? Yes; the image may be worn and defaced, but it is His image that I bear. I, the prodigal, I who have strayed so far and fallen so low, am I a child of God? Yes; I may be a lost son, yet am I a son still. Myself, this ruined shrine, where "the snake nests in the altar-stone," whence all things pure have fled, does the Holy One still call this His own, still seek entrance here? He does, He does. I may sell myself to the devil, body, soul, and spirit; yet do

I belong to God: He has rights in me that no deed of mine can set aside. This is what Christ would teach me. Shall I not come to Him?

III. *Self-control*.—Of the necessity of this virtue it can hardly be necessary for me to speak. Long centuries ago Plato depicted the soul under the figure of a many-headed monster, a lion, and a man combined in one form. The man represents the higher nature, the reason; the lion, the passionate element; the many-headed monster, the lusts and appetites. Only when the man within us rules is it well with the soul. Scripture is full of the same truth. "He that ruleth his spirit," says the wise man, "is better than he that taketh a city." "Gird up the loins of your mind and be sober." "I *brutify* my body," says Paul, and the word he uses is a very picturesque one; it is borrowed from the language of a pugilist in the Grecian games: we might almost translate, "I beat it black and blue." He will spare no pains to keep under his body and to bring it into subjection.

Let every young man then be sure of this, that if he does not learn to practise self-control, he is lost.

But is this the conclusion of the whole matter? Is there no more to be said? I take down Emerson's noble essay on "Self-reliance," with its motto so characteristic of its author's teaching, *ne te quæsieris extra*. All through the essay he rings the changes on this word: "trust thyself,"

"insist on yourself," "nothing can bring you peace but yourself." And the world owes a great debt to Emerson for his preaching of this hardy, vigorous gospel. But is there salvation in it? Salvation, I mean, for the weak and them that are ready to perish? "Let not sin reign in your mortal body." But what if the usurper be already in possession? Where is the stronger than the strong man armed? Plato can tell me that the man should keep his foot upon the beast; but will Plato, will anybody, tell me what I am to do when the paw of the brute is on my back and his cruel fangs are at my throat? Who then shall deliver my soul from the mouth of the lion?

I speak to some of you who feel yourselves helpless, almost hopeless. I might put the trumpet to my lips and cry with all the moral energy of which I am capable, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong"; but you have no power to respond. I might bid you "flee youthful lusts"; but it is too late; they have you and hold you as in an iron vice. If "nothing can bring you peace but yourself," you are undone. I might preach self-control till the crack of doom, and it would avail you nothing. The reins are out of your hands, and the wild horses of passion are carrying you whithersoever they will, unchecked.

What shall I say to you? Not "be strong" simply—there is no Gospel in that; but, "be

was impossible for me to do it." With those pure eyes upon him he could not sin. Yet that is but a feeble image of the power that Christ is for salvation in the hearts of them that receive Him.

"Yield not your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin : but yield yourselves unto God"—so runs our English version ; but there is a truth in the word that no translation can reproduce. The tenses of the verbs are not the same.¹ Perhaps we might paraphrase in some such way as this : "Do not go on yielding yourselves to sin, but now by one definite act yield yourselves to God." The one word points to the successive acts of sin by which evil at last obtains the mastery over us ; the other to the one act of supreme self-surrender which carries all else with it.² It is to that supreme self-surrender I call you now. Lay in Christ's hand, once for all, the sceptre of your life ; say to Him—

"In full and glad surrender,
I give myself to Thee,
Thine utterly and only
And evermore to be.
Reign over me, Lord Jesus !
O make my heart Thy throne !
It shall be Thine, my Saviour,
It shall be Thine alone."

¹ παριστάνετε . . . παραστήσατε.

² See Bishop Westcott's papers on R.V. in *Expositor* (Third Series).

HOW JESUS DEALT WITH INQUIRERS

II

HOW JESUS DEALT WITH INQUIRERS

THE subject of this address is one of which the four Gospels are full. Yet I do not know of any particular verse that I can use as "text." But since the address itself will be full of "texts" from beginning to end, there is perhaps the less need. My plan is a very simple one—to let the sacred narratives tell their own story, and show us how Jesus dealt with the men and women who sought Him.

Jesus had inquirers—that is the first point to notice. Probably even we who have been reading our Bibles all our life have never yet realised how the multitudes of Palestine sought after Christ. Take, *e.g.*, St. Mark's Gospel, and run your eye rapidly over its earlier chapters, and note with what remarkable frequency sentences like these occur: "And they say unto Him, All are seeking Thee";¹ "And they came to Him from every quarter";² "And when . . . it was

¹ i. 36.

² i. 45.

noised that He was in the house, many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, no, not even about the door: and He spake the word unto them";¹ "And He went forth again by the seaside, and all the multitude resorted unto Him";² "And Jesus with His disciples withdrew to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed";³ "And He cometh into a house. And the multitude cometh together again";⁴ "He cometh . . . and the multitude cometh"—so is it ever. In the house, by the sea-shore, in the desert—wherever He is, there are the multitudes gathered together. Or we may take individual instances. Wise men from the East come to His cradle saying, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" As the shadow of the cross falls upon Him, Greeks from the West say, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Nicodemus comes to Him by night. John sends messengers to Him from prison. The woman of Samaria questions Him at the well by the wayside. His very enemies, writhing in their helplessness, confess, "Behold how ye prevail nothing: lo, the world is gone after Him."

So was it in Christ's day. How is it to-day? Ah me! we are all discussing "non-churchgoing," and lamenting that the "multitudes" seem to care so little for the preaching of Christ's Gospel. And truly that is sad enough. But what seems to me far sadder still, is that good men and

¹ ii. 1, 2.² ii. 13.³ iii. 7.⁴ iii. 20.

women should come together in conferences and conventions and what not, and say, as I have heard them say, "Yes, yes; we may not have got the crowds, and our churches may be half empty; but then, after all, crowds are not everything; it is where two or three are gathered together that Christ has promised to be." Well, we may set up what excuses of straw we like, the fact remains—when Jesus was here upon earth, the crowds were with Him, the common people heard Him gladly; and if to-day His Church has lost or is losing its hold upon the multitudes, something is wrong, somebody is to blame.

Christ's example tests individuals as well as Churches. Men in doubt, in difficulty, in trouble came to Him. We Christians are His representatives to-day; does anybody come to us? Does any one ever say to you, "I am wrong, all wrong; can you help me?" Does some poor mother ever ask you to sit with her sick lad? When there is death in the house, and the blinds are drawn, and the mourners go softly, do they listen for your knock, and wish that you may come? Are we wanted? When we are gone, will any one miss us?

Christ had inquirers; how did He deal with them? Mark—and while so many to-day deny His sovereign claims, let these unworthy hands put the crown upon His brow,—*He was never*

puzzled. He is never taken aback ; He never hesitates. The troubled look of perplexity never gathers on His face : He meets every questioner with the steady gaze of one before whose clear vision the whole world of truth lies open. His enemies scheme and lay their trap and put up their spokesman with his well-conned speech, but He is never taken by surprise. He never takes a case to *avizandum*, as the Scottish law-courts say. He does not say, "The problem is new, I must take time to consider it ; come back again to-morrow." Pharisees and Herodians may take counsel together how they shall catch Him in His talk ; He takes counsel with no man how He shall answer them. Yet, though His retorts can be sharp and terrible, He never quibbles or dodges or evades, and even the very form of His answers is so perfect that to mend is to mar.¹

There is an open-air service going on in the streets of Jerusalem ; the preacher is Jesus. Just on the edge of the crowd stands a little group of "officers"—policemen, as we should say—listening spell-bound. They have been sent by the authorities to take Jesus. But they go back without their prisoner. "Why have ye not brought Him?" "Never man spake like this Man!" Were they not right?

Yet Jesus did not answer all His questioners. "When thou wast young," said Christ to Peter, "thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou

¹ See Dr. Robertson Nicoll's very suggestive *Life of Jesus Christ*.

wouldest : but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Just at that moment, Peter, turning about, sees John following : " Lord, and this man, what ? " " If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? follow thou Me." " And one said unto Him, Lord, are they few that be saved ? And He said unto them, Strive to enter in by the narrow door : for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." " Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel ? " And once more He lays His finger on their lips : " It is not for you to know—it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father hath set within His own authority."

What does it mean ? That Christ can hold no interview with idle curiosity ; that He will not satisfy mere prying inquisitiveness. " The secret things belong unto the Lord our God " ; and when with our coarse fingers we twitch at the veil that hides them from us, He does but answer us with His " It is not for you to know." " Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat : but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat." And who shall murmur that it is so ? If seven things are revealed, may not the eighth be kept secret ? If we may wander at will through the many-roomed mansion of God's great universe, who shall complain if here and there is a locked door

whereon His finger has written *Private*? But Christ forbids vain speculation only to enforce obvious duty. "And this man, what?" "What is that to thee? *follow thou Me.*" "Are they few that be saved?" "*Strive to enter in at that narrow door.*" "Dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" "It is not for you to know . . . but ye shall receive power . . . *and ye shall be my witnesses.*" He hath showed thee, O man, what is good. "It is true, although strange," says a great and wise writer,¹ "that there are multitudes of burning questions which we must do our best to ignore, to forget their existence; and it is not more strange, after all, than many other facts in this wonderfully mysterious and defective existence of ours. One-fourth of life is intelligible, the other three-fourths is unintelligible darkness; and our earliest duty is to cultivate the habit of not looking round the corner." Well would it be for many of us, if, like the Psalmist, we "stilled and quieted" our souls; if we did not exercise ourselves in great matters, in things that are too high for us.

The silences of Jesus are not ended yet. He is before the high priest, on the eve of the crucifixion. He listens as the false witnesses demolish one another's testimony, but He says nothing. At last the high priest can bear it no longer: "Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee?" "But He

¹ Mark Rutherford.

held His peace and answered nothing." Again, He is before Pilate in the palace: "Whence art Thou?" "But Jesus gave him no answer." Yet again, He is before Herod: "And he questioned Him in many words; but He answered him nothing."

What does it mean? That leering wickedness, bold, defiant badness, gross, conscience-defiling sin will get no answer from the pure lips of Jesus. With Caiaphas standing in the shoes of the holy men of old and yet compassing the death of the Son of God: with Pilate the unjust judge who first acquitted and then commanded to be scourged his innocent Prisoner: with Herod wagging his impudent tongue, when he should rather have died of shame in the presence of the friend of the murdered Baptist—what converse can Jesus have with such as these? He answered them nothing.

I draw a bow at a venture. It may seem like needless insult to bracket any of you who read these words with Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod. Yet who knows what devilry may lurk under a fine dress or a decent coat? But this I say unto you, by the word of the Lord, that if your life be corrupt and unclean, if you are playing fast and loose with the plainest laws of God, do not come whining about your difficulties—literary difficulties, historical difficulties, and the like—for you will get no answer. Go, read your Decalogue; that, at least, is simple enough. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your

doings. Then come back, and perchance this Christ may hold some speech with you. Till then, silence—silence—silence.

Turn once more to another group of questioners. You may read of them in the 22nd chapter of Matthew. Here is a little knot of men who, caring nothing about Cæsar or tribute-money, have become suddenly interested in both: "What thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" And here are the Sadducees with their elaborately trifling conundrum concerning the seven-times-wedded widow: "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her." And last of all a lawyer, a little casuist, with his nice discriminations and fine-spun distinctions, anxious about laws that are great, and laws that are small: "which is the great commandment in the law?" We know how they fared, one and all: confusion overwhelmed them. "No one was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions."

Let us bring our questions to Christ, but let us take heed to ourselves. We cannot deceive Him. He "perceived their craftiness." He knows what is in man, and needeth not that any should ask Him. He darts His swift interrogation into our inmost souls: "Why reason ye in your hearts?" He plucks aside the hypocrite's robe, and shows him the naked self within. Bring your question, but remember Christ will go behind the

question to the questioner. He will not deal with you as with an anonymous correspondent, and send you the answer, not knowing who or what you are. "I also will ask of you one question," He says. And if you dare not meet His gaze ; if your question is a sham, and yourself a hypocrite, He will only answer you with the hypocrite's infinite rebuke, or with the silence that stabs worse than His keenest words—"neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

But it is time to turn to the other side of our subject. If Christ seems to us sometimes stern and harsh, yet on the other hand what large and loving and helpful answers He gives to the sincere and earnest seeker ! "And when He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve, asked of Him the parables." And he sits down by their side, as a mother with her child, and makes all things plain to them. They bring to Him their failures, and ask Him the wherefore of them : "Why could not we cast him out ?" And He tells them : "Because of your little faith This kind can come forth by nothing save by prayer." And even when there seems a tone of reproach in His voice, that they should be so slow of heart to learn the meaning of His life, He repeats the old lesson again with added sweetness and beauty : "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip ?" And we pass from thence as from the temple's porch

into the very Holy of Holies of Christ's teaching. So is it always. A wayside beggar, blind and forlorn, cries to Him, "Lord, that I may receive my sight!" And immediately the sightless eyeballs are made to see. A leper outcast from the ways and homes of men clings to Him: "Lord, if thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." And He put forth His hand and touched him, and his flesh came again as the flesh of a little child. Ignorance, groping blindly in the dark, turns piteously to Him: "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe on Him?" "Thou hast both seen Him, and He it is that talketh with thee." And when John sends from the prison, where doubts rained thick and fast upon him, to ask, "Art Thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" this time Christ will not content himself with a merely verbal message, but, "in that hour He cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits; and in many that were blind, He restored sight," and *then* the answer is given, "Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard."

It would be easy enough to multiply instances of Christ's ready response to the earnest inquirer. But these perhaps may suffice. One or two simple principles now emerge and may be briefly stated. Christ dealt with men *individually*. All our talk nowadays is about the "masses." Jesus never "lumped" men in that indiscriminate fashion. He concerned himself with individuals—Peter, James, John, Mary, Martha. The brief story of

* His life is full of private interviews. And so dealing with men, He entered, by the power of His perfect sympathy, into the life of each, and met, because He knew its individual wants. "He takes your view of things," says James Smetham, in one of his delightful letters, "and mentions no other. He takes the old woman's view of things by the wash-tub, and has a great interest in wash powder; Sir Isaac Newton's view of things, and wings among the stars with him; the artist's view, and feeds among the lilies; the lawyer's, and shares the justice of things. But He never plays the lawyer or the philosopher or the artist to the old woman. He is above that littleness."

This is the explanation of Christ's infinitely varied methods of dealing with men. It is only the quack who has one remedy that will suit a hundred different patients; the wise physician studies each case separately, marking individual symptoms, tracing back the course of the disease to its very beginning. It was so the Great Physician dealt with the souls of men.

"He took the suffering human race,
He read each wound, each weakness clear,
And struck His finger on the place,
And said, *Thou ailest here and here.*"¹

"Master," said one, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." It is the language not of insincerity but of thoughtlessness, of a

¹ Matthew Arnold.

shallow nature, quickly stirred. The speaker does not know himself ; and therefore Christ thrusts him back upon himself that he may learn the needed lesson. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests ; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head—now, wilt thou be My disciple?" Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night : "Rabbi,"—I wonder how often he had said the little speech over to himself,—“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these signs that Thou doest except God be with him.” But Nicodemus is on the wrong tack ; there is no salvation that way ; and so Jesus pulls him up sharp : “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He “struck His finger on the place.” “All these things”—the commandments—said the rich young ruler, “have I observed from my youth. What lack I yet?” Again Christ strikes His finger on the place : “Go sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor,”—thou ailest *here*. For awhile, as He talks with the woman of Samaria, His words slip off unheeded from the hard surface of her life. Then, suddenly, unerringly, His finger is on the place : “Go call thy husband.” You can see the patient wince : “I—I—I—I have no husband.” But this Physician makes no mistakes ; the sharp stroke did its work ; to her last day, Christ would be to this woman “the Man that told me all things that ever I did,” and so telling her, saved her.

Hear, then, the conclusion of the whole matter. The sincere inquirer may always come boldly. The disciples, we read once, "understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask Him." But the disciple need never fear. With loud-tongued hypocrisy, with strutting ignorance, boasting itself to be some great one, Christ can have no fellowship. But with meek-eyed sincerity, with ignorance that bows its head and craves to be taught, He "will wear the stars out with loving talk." Do we really want His answer? Then we may have it—an answer to our own question, and in our own speech.

Take your questions to Christ Himself. "We spake to Thy disciples"—our teachers, our ministers—"that they should cast out our doubts; but they could not." "*Bring them unto Me*," says Jesus. If, like Nathaniel, you are a man with a prejudice, "come and see," see for yourself. Do not stop short at Philip; get to Christ. Wilt thou also be His inquirer? Say unto Him, "Lord, that I may receive my sight!" and He will make your blind eyes to see. Plead with Him, "If Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean," and He will take away the leprosy of your sin. Cry with the energy born of despair, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us," and He will cast out the evil spirit that has torn your life, for *this* Man commandeth even the unclean spirits of our modern time—Drunkenness, Gambling, Lust, Avarice—and they do obey Him!

WHAT IS IT TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

"That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."—GAL. ii. 20.

III

WHAT IS IT TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

IT is very perplexing and not a little disheartening to a preacher of the Gospel to find that there are many, even among those who listen to him every week, who have still no clear and definite conception of what is meant by being a Christian. That humbling experience has been mine several times of late. As one and another have told me of their difficulties ; as I have seen the mist which for them has hung about Christ and the Christian life, I have felt rebuked. I have thought, if I have not said, "Is this all that one's preaching has done? Christ, what He is, what He has done for man, what He claims from man, —is it still all so dark, so vague, so unreal? Surely there must be something defective, at least something wanting in directness and simplicity, in a ministry which can leave so many of those who listen to it floundering in a morass of uncertainties and misconceptions."

I want in this address, therefore, to go back to

the first principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And if to some of you I seem to be treading an old and well-beaten track, you will, I am sure, bear with me if one word of mine can help some one to see Jesus.

Part of my task must be to seek to remove misconceptions of what it is that Christ asks from us. It is not, I think, saying too much to declare that Christ's way into the hearts and minds of multitudes is blocked by obstacles wholly of our own creating. We will insist on what Christ never insists. To His conditions, at once simple and all-sufficient, we will add others of our own.

Yet let me be quite clear. I am not in search of a "religion made easy" to suit any man's convenience. I do not want to make the door wider than Christ has made it. I doubt very much if I should help any one by saying: "Ah! you have intellectual difficulties, have you? Well, come let us see; I will cut down the creed to a minimum for you; this may go, and that, and that—there now, there's no difficulty with the rest, is there?" No good comes of that kind of thing. The man who says "Halve your creed and I'll turn Christian" is not the man to come to Christ though you do halve your creed to suit him. If you come to me asking, "How little need I believe in order to be a Christian?" I am afraid I cannot help you. You are on the wrong tack; you are coming to the question in the wrong spirit; you are anxious about the wrong things. Christ is con-

cerned about your disordered spiritual condition ; and here are you troubled above all things else about the wholeness of your intellectual skin. Moreover, "belief" of the sort you mean is of quite secondary importance ; such belief commendeth us not to God : neither if we believe—in this sense—are we the better ; nor if we believe not are we the worse.

Still, though I say this—and I think it ought to be said—there are many who, to their own hurt, confuse things that differ, who lose the essential amid the non-essential, who (as I have said already) insist upon what Christ does not insist, and so make His plain ways rough, His straight paths crooked. It is such as these that I want to keep specially in mind in what follows.

Go back to the verse I have taken as my text : "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." I do not come to these words as a theological expositor, and there is very much in them of which just now I can say nothing. I quote them for one special purpose : that they may reveal to us the secret of the Christian life. And certainly, if ever to man that secret was made known, it was to the Apostle Paul. He explains it to us in these words. Here is his answer, concise yet comprehensive, to our question, What is it to be a Christian? Mark then—*To be a Christian is to be living by faith*

in personal union with Jesus Christ. The Christian life is a life of which Christ is "motive, pattern, and power." This is vital, essential; all else is secondary. Moreover, this is a working definition of Christianity about which there is now pretty general agreement. Take these words, *e.g.*, from the pen of an eminent theologian, with whom on many points not a few of us would find ourselves entirely at variance: "True Christianity," says the Rev. Charles Gore, "is a personal relationship—the conscious, deliberate adhesion of men who know their weakness, their sin, their fallibility, to a Redeemer whom they know to be supreme, sinless, infallible."¹ General Booth might subscribe to that as readily as the editor of *Lux Mundi*.

Let me now, for the sake of greater clearness, split up what I have just said into two or three simple negative propositions.

1. *To be a Christian does not mean simply to be what we call "a good man."*—Here is one who is truthful, honest, kind, loving—surely, we say, he is a Christian? But we have just seen that to be a Christian means to be in a certain definite relation to Jesus Christ. But this man—I am supposing a case—takes no account of Christ whatsoever, gives Him no place in his life, wholly ignores—it may be openly repudiates—the claims of His authority over him. How then, if words are to have any meaning at all, can we call such a one a Christian? This is not, be it observed, to

¹ *The Incarnation of the Son of God*, p. 1.

deny the reality of his truthfulness, his honesty, his kindness, or whatever other virtues he may possess ; it is to deny his right to the name of Christian.

So again, when from any cause a man is aroused to a serious concern about himself, his first thought is often how he may better himself : he will root out that vice, he will cultivate this virtue. With a wistful earnestness, pathetic almost in its eagerness, I have heard men under some strong spiritual impulse resolve that they would "try to be good," and live a purer life. God forbid that I should discourage such "trying." Anything, anything is better than the callous ease that is content to let things slide. And "trying to be good" may do something—much indeed ; certainly, no goodness is to be got without our trying. But we shall never become *Christians* that way. That is beginning at the wrong end. The starting point of the Christian life is, and must be, Christ. He is its Alpha as He is also its Omega.

"But," it may be urged, "if without Christ a man may attain to goodness, why concern himself about Christ at all? Religion itself can aim at nothing higher than that." And that is so far true. Christianity is Christ's way of bringing men to God and making them Godlike, that is, good. A Christian man is nothing more nor less than just a good man in the making. But the point to be emphasized is this, that while the possibilities

of attainment in the one case are limited by the individual and the forces that centre in him, in the other they are limited only by Christ Himself. The two great questions are these—What is your moral ideal? What is your “moral dynamic”?¹ The Christian’s answer to both is “Christ.” In Him he has the highest possible ideal; in Him, too, the power needful to realise it. You may point me to good men who are not Christians, and to unworthy men who say they are Christians. But that means no more than this, that while the one has been true to his ideal, and has made use of such power as was his, the other has done neither. My present contention remains untouched, that while it may be true that a man may reject Christ and yet be possessed of many virtues—be, what we call, using the word in no very exact sense, a good man—nevertheless his life can never know the moral greatness, the repose, the triumph which are all possible to him whose life centres in Christ, who finds in His perfect example an ever-lifting ideal, in His Divine strength a never-changing stay.

2. *To be a Christian does not mean necessarily to believe a certain creed.*—A simple illustration will make my point clear. We call a man Liberal or Conservative, Home Ruler or Unionist; what do we mean? That he holds certain political opinions, that he has assumed a certain definite mental attitude towards one or other of

¹ I borrow the phrase from Principal Shairp.

the current political creeds. This is not, or at least it should not be, a personal matter. A wise citizen holds to his belief, not because it happens to be expounded by this or that parliamentary leader, but because he regards it as being under all the circumstances the best and truest attainable. He does not, as we sometimes say, pin his faith to any man.

But the holding of no number of opinions, accurate or inaccurate, biblical, theological, or what not, entitles a man to the Christian name. For here the vital point is not the relation of the intellect to a creed, but the attitude of the whole man—the will, the feelings, the intellect—to a person. He who thus with his whole being cleaves to Christ is a Christian, though he may be as yet in utter bewilderment as to the relation of his intellect to the various details of Christian doctrine.

There has grown up around the central truth of Christianity a great body of Christian theology. For myself, I am persuaded that he who enters into that personal relationship with Christ of which I have been speaking will find in this theology, for the most part, the fittest expression of the various truths which flow out from or are associated with that central fact. Do not let us be guilty of the silly freak—surely one of the silliest of which any thinking man can be convicted—of ridiculing theology. What is theology? Man's knowledge of God systematised. What is

astronomy? Man's knowledge of the stars systematised. And why should we not systematise our knowledge of God as well as our knowledge of the stars? But—and this is the point I want to emphasize—if this theology, or any part of it, is to you an insuperable difficulty, if it is barring your way to Christ, put it upon one side; it will be soon enough to deal with it by and by. Your sole concern now is with Jesus Christ Himself; resolutely refuse to suffer anything—Bible, creed, or Church—to come between you and Him. I have known many a man whose Old Testament has positively been transformed for him into an angel with a drawn sword keeping him back from the Tree of Life. May God save you from a blunder so terrible!

But perhaps you will tell me there is at least one article in the creed of which a man must be sure if he is to become a Christian, viz. the Divinity of Christ. Paul's faith was in the *Son of God*; "and it is just there," says some one, "that I hesitate: that is my difficulty." Only the other day I received a letter from a young man pressing this very point. "If only I could believe," he said, "that Jesus were truly Divine, I think I could get on. As it is, there is a deadlock, and I get no further." I do not think it is right to assume that such cases are very frequent. There are doubtless many to-day who question or deny the Divinity of our Lord; but of these the number who would, were it not for this doubt, trust in Christ as their

Saviour is, I believe, exceedingly small. Still, be they few or many, they have a right to the help they ask for.

Two or three years ago an eminent theologian and preacher caused no small stir in certain orthodox circles by publicly declaring that "we must not too hastily conclude that even a belief in Christ's Divinity is essential to the true Christian"; though he was careful to add, what his critics were not always equally careful to remember, that to "the mature Christian" such a belief is essential. The statement was sharply condemned by many. Yet with the four Gospels in our hands how can we deny the truth of it? When Christ called the twelve disciples, He put them through no catechism; He did not insist upon a belief concerning Himself, which indeed for them then would have been a simple impossibility. He bade them, "follow Me"; He attached them to Himself, till out of that personal attachment there sprang at last the love, the devotion, the insight that flowered in the deep mysticism of John's theology, the ethical thoroughness of Peter's Epistles. My brother, do you feel your need of what Christ offers? Do you believe that He is able and willing to give it you? Then begin there, wait for nothing more. Out of this smallest of seeds there may grow a Christian life strong and vigorous. Go to Christ and say unto Him, "O Lord, not yet do I know Thee as Thou art. My eyes are weak and cannot bear the full blaze of

Thy light ; deal with me as with one of Thy foolish ones. Thou art wise and good ; teach me how I may become as Thou art. I bow myself to Thee ; I take upon me the yoke of Thy commands ; I will wear it day by day till I too find the rest Thou hast promised to all that come to Thee."

3. *To be a Christian is not the same thing as to have once experienced the change we call "conversion."*—I speak now to quite a different class of persons ; and on this point one word must suffice. Are there not many among us to whom to be a Christian means to pass through a short, sharp, decisive crisis, which works indeed a mighty transformation in the life, but which ends with itself? Is not this the reason why in all our churches there are so many unsatisfied and unsatisfactory Christians? They have no ringing gladness in their life, no sense of mastery over sin, nothing but the memory of a change wrought long years ago in the far-off past. It was not so that Paul conceived Christianity. He experienced a conversion as striking, as decisive as ever happened to any man ; but conversion to him was only the soul's first surrender, to be daily and hourly renewed through a life of perfect devotion to Christ. The fountain of Paul's rejoicing was fed not only by the memory of a past mercy, but by the experience of a present salvation.

I call you not to a brief, terminable transaction

with Christ, but to an abiding fellowship. Christ does not, if I may use a homely phrase, set us on our feet and then leave us to get on as best we may. Conversion is the first point in a series whose number is infinity. We are summoned not only to one supreme act of faith, but to a *life* of faith.

If now you have followed me thus far in my attempt to show what Christianity really is, there ought to be no difficulty in understanding why here, and indeed all through the New Testament, so much importance is attached to "faith." "What has faith to do with salvation? Why does it matter what a man believes?" people sometimes ask impatiently. Such questions would be impossible if those who ask them would but learn the facts. To my mind "faith," so far from being an unreasonable condition, is the only possible one. For consider: what do we mean by "faith"? To many of us, I fear, the word is only a technical term of the science of theology; we have taken it out of the realm of common life and robbed it of all its simple everyday significance. Inextricable confusion, and worse, has been the result. Faith is *trust*; and the faith that saves is the same faith that we all know of and are exercising every day—differing only in this that it is fixed on Christ and not on man.

Now do we not begin to understand the reasonableness of the New Testament's emphasis on faith? Christianity, we have seen, is a personal

relationship, the union of the soul with Christ. What then but trust *can* be the basis of such a union? What else on earth save this can knit two souls in any high and holy fellowship? Money will not do it; ties of blood will not do it; the marriage tie itself will not do it, as the newspapers with ghastly emphasis every now and again remind us. Love, trust—there is no other cement for human hearts. It is so in religion. Custom and convention may secure us to Christ's Church. We may read our Bible and pray and worship till we are strapped hand and foot to the outward forms of religion; but the love of the heart, the trust that is the outgoing of the whole soul—this is the one, and only thing that can bind us to Christ Himself.

And who is it who thus claims our trust and love? "The life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God"—did Paul put the full stop there? No; listen—"Who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Christ seeks our love, but He has first given His. He asks our trust; but to win it, He laid down His life for us. Is He not the utterly lovable, the utterly trustworthy? There is a favourite Scottish picture that many of you have seen, "Charles Edward seeking shelter in the house of an adherent." The humble Highland peasants gladly risk life and all for the sake of their loved prince. But here the Prince lays down His life for the beggar.

"*The Son of God* who loved me!" You saw

the sunshine this morning that came on its long, long journey to our earth. It flushed the great mountain peaks ; it rolled vast billows of light through the deep valleys ; it brightened the busy haunts of men ; it made the old world seem young again. Was that all the sunshine did ? No ; it kissed the mountain-daisy, "wee crimson-tippit flower," as it lifted its little face to the light ; it woke into being the tiny insect-life that ends its brief day with the evening twilight ; it stole noiselessly into the sick-room where the night-watcher waited wearily for the day, and the sick one moved himself and murmured, "Thank God, morning has come at last !"

"*Son of God*," and yet "He loved me and gave Himself for *me* !" He is creation's great Lord ; He made the worlds ; He holds all together by the power of His might ; King of kings and Lord of lords, and He loved *me* and gave Himself for *me* !

All that is behind His question ; and this is His question : "Lovest thou Me ?" "Lovest thou Me ?" "Lovest thou Me ?" What is your answer ?

WHY OUGHT I TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

"*Follow Me.*" — LUKE v. 27.

IV

WHY OUGHT I TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

THAT was Christ's call to Matthew; it is Christ's call to us. Why should we obey it? Why—to put the question in concrete form—ought I to be a Christian? To answer that question is the aim of this address.

Obviously the question admits of many and different answers. Need I say I claim no sort of superiority for mine? This only I will say of it: it is my own, that is, it is the answer which appeals most strongly to my own heart and conscience, while at the same time it does full justice to my reason. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen," must always be the language of a man who would speak to any purpose on a subject like this. And whatever else is to be said for the answer which I am about to give you, there is one man at least who has found in it reasons all-sufficient to bind him to the service of Jesus Christ.

"Why ought I to be a Christian?" But mani-

festly there is a preliminary question—"What is a Christian?" As I have dealt with this question in the previous address, there is no need to delay over it here. One point only let me reiterate. The possession of a certain set of more or less clearly defined religious beliefs does not make a man a Christian. That has been said, I know, a thousand times; but it is needful to repeat it for the thousand and first time. The looseness of thought which prevails on this subject, even among well-instructed persons, is simply amazing. A man holds certain opinions on certain current political questions, and we call him a Liberal or a Conservative; on certain current social questions, and we call him a Socialist or an Individualist. And we think we can go on with our labelling; and because he holds certain opinions on religious matters, we call him a Christian. Men tell us sometimes they have "given up" Christianity. As a matter of fact, what do they mean? Merely this, that once they held certain opinions on a number of difficult subjects of high theological speculation—the creation of the world, the inspiration of the Bible, the immortality of the soul—and that now they no longer hold those opinions. Well, they have changed their minds—that is all. To those of their friends who are interested in the history of their intellectual development that may be a fact of considerable importance; but to speak of it as a "giving up" of Christianity is surely a gross and wanton misuse of terms. Christ is not

concerned about the "views" we hold; it was something wholly different from this on which during His life He laid the emphasis. The Spirit, He said, should convince men of sin; why? "*Because they believe not in Me*"; not, mark, "because they do not believe certain things concerning Me," but "because they believe not in Me"—because they do not yield themselves to Me, trust in Me, serve and follow Me. Now, that is a relationship not primarily intellectual, though of course the intellect is concerned in it, but moral and spiritual. And only he who has thus been brought into this personal fellowship with Jesus Christ is, in the New Testament meaning of the word, a true Christian.¹

Now we come back again to the question with which we set out, "Why ought I to be a Christian?"

To answer the question, I will ask you to consider with me one or two simple statements of fact, which I shall not so much try to prove as to enforce, and then see to what conclusion they lead us.

1. I begin with this: *Goodness is the greatest thing in the world, and to seek after goodness is our first duty in life.*—Let me explain. Men have sometimes thought of religion as a kind of distinct entity—a something separate from all the other concerns of life to the pursuit of which one

¹ See Mr. Price Hughes' *Social Christianity*, in which the point of this paragraph is put with admirable force and clearness.

man might give himself just as another gives himself to art, or literature, or politics. Life has been, so to speak, mapped out into provinces, and among the rest religion has had its place. But now we are coming to see that religion, instead of being one among many provinces of life, is rather a something which includes them all; and that, instead of being sought as a thing wholly apart from the ordinary affairs of life, it is just there or nowhere that it is to be attained. So that when, e.g., the call of Christ comes to a man who has chosen for himself a political career, it does not mean "Quit your politics," but "There, where you are, serve and obey Jesus Christ." It has been, perhaps, one of the weaknesses of evangelical Christianity that it has not always sufficiently recognised this.

When therefore it is said that goodness is the principal thing, and that above all else we should seek after goodness, this does not mean that all the other rightful ambitions of life are to be ruthlessly crushed under our heel, but that they are to be kept in due subordination to what must ever be the supreme aim of every true life—to do what is right in the sight of God.

Here, then, is the truth I want to emphasize: there are many things that are *desirable*; there is one thing that is *necessary*.¹ Life presents us with

¹ I am indebted for this convenient distinction to—if I mistake not—an article by Mr. George St. Mivart in an old number of the *Nineteenth Century*.

many and varying forms of greatness. There is the greatness of wisdom, the greatness of political influence, the greatness of material power ; but high above all other forms of greatness is the greatness of goodness.

Ordinarily we do not question this. But there is to-day, under certain circumstances, a real temptation to do so. When the late Principal Shairp published his little volume on Burns,¹ he was very severely taken to task by some of his critics for the way in which he had dealt with some of the moral shortcomings of the great Scottish poet. Of course I am not going to enter into the controversy here ; but my whole heart goes with the Principal in one sentence of his reply : " It was needful," he said, " to make a strong protest against the fatal doctrine that men of genius hold a charter of exemption from the obligations of the Divine law."² " Never let us allow ourselves," said Dean Church once—and only those who know the extraordinary breadth and fulness of the speaker's knowledge can fully appreciate the force of his warning³—" never let us allow ourselves the thought, which I fear comes

¹ In the " English Men of Letters " Series.

² See *Principal Shairp and his Friends*, by Professor Knight.

³ " Dean Church," said Mr. John Morley once to Mr. Stead, " is the consummate flower of the Christian culture of the England that is passing away. We shall never look upon his like again. The conditions have disappeared which alone rendered possible the production of so perfect a specimen of a gentleman, a Churchman, and a scholar. He is the finest and the last type of the Oxford of

into men's minds, that being clever and having knowledge makes up for not caring to be good."

Goodness the greatest thing in the world—is it not so? What a tribute to the supremacy of goodness is the life of Jesus! "All these things," said the tempter, "will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." "Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan." Dares any man say that Jesus made a mistake? That He sacrificed a splendid opportunity to a foolish dream? What are all the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them if, to make them ours, we sell our own souls? What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? "It were better," says John Henry Newman in a well-known passage, "for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse." They may call this the language of exaggeration that choose; its essential truth is beyond dispute: the value of the moral and spiritual is not to be expressed in terms of the material; goodness is so great, so supreme, so solitary in its greatness that you can measure it by nothing else, however good or fair, that life can show.

the past. Our universities, with their examinations and their modern spirit, bear other fruit."—"Character Sketch," *Review of Reviews*, 1891.

I make my appeal direct to every young man's conscience : is not goodness to be preferred above our chief joy ? Promotion in office, prosperity in business, honours and ribbons at the university—God grant you them all, if you deserve them ! yet are they all but as the small dust of the balance by the side of Peter's supreme question "whether it be RIGHT . . . !" You may not just now, and always, measure things so. A thousand clamorous tongues may seek to drown the voice of the better self within you. But, believe me, there will come a time again, when all these other voices will be hushed, and in that holy silence of the soul you will know—know beyond all doubt, beyond all controversy—that for ever and for ever is it true, that better than to be rich or clever or famous, is it to be pure and true and good.

To speak in detail of this goodness after which man ought to seek would carry me too far afield. Let me notice two points only. In the first place, the good we need is not simply power to perform one or two good deeds, but—to put it in a word—*character*. It is not merely the ingrafting of a new slip into the old tree that is required, but the infusion of a new life that shall carry budding vigour and vitality to every withered branch and twig. And, secondly, it is our duty to seek after the highest goodness that is revealed to us ; to be, as we sometimes say, "as good as we know," or rather, as we may know if we will. "I ought," is

a different word on my lips from what it is on the lips of an untutored savage. "It was my duty to have loved the highest"; and it is every man's duty to reach after the highest God has placed within his reach.

Let us pause a moment, and see how far we have come. We began with the question, "Why ought I to be a Christian?" and we have learned this: that goodness is the greatest thing in the world—that man's first duty is to seek after goodness—the highest goodness that is within his reach. So far, I think, we shall all have kept the rank. May we not now take another step without any falling out of line?

2. *The highest form of goodness of which the world knows is incarnate for us in Jesus Christ.*—This is not a statement that is likely now to be seriously challenged. If it were necessary, I might quote the authority of great names,—names, too, that are tainted by no suspicion of orthodoxy. I might remind you of John Stuart Mill's oft-quoted saying, that "even now it would not be easy even for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life"; or of Matthew Arnold's "Christ is an *Absolute*; we cannot get behind Him and above Him"; or of Goethe's, "the Divine Man, the Saint, the type and model of all men." But I confess I do not care for this kind of thing; it comes to sound like benevolent

patronage of Jesus—of all things the most intolerable to the Christian consciousness. Besides, it helps nobody. Do we seriously believe that men cannot be sure of the utter goodness of Jesus unless first we put into their hands a certificate signed by John Stuart Mill and half a dozen other great men? This surely is not a question of authority; let a man look for himself. "We criticise every other teacher," some one¹ has truly said, "we have an intuition of Jesus." Do you remind me there are some in whose eyes He hath "no form nor comeliness; and when they see Him, there is no beauty that they should desire Him"? Yes; and there are some—the world is so much with them—who see no beauty in the fair face of earth and sky and sea: "the sea that bares her bosom to the moon," "the silence that is in the starry sky, the sleep that is among the lonely hills"—all this moves them not. Is nature, therefore, not beautiful? And if across the eyes of some prejudice, or ignorance, or sin has drawn its thick film that so they cannot see this Jesus, then because the few are blinded shall the many doubt their seeing? Conviction in this matter cometh not by argument, nor by demonstration of logic, but by moral and spiritual instinct. He who with his own eyes has once seen the real Jesus *knows* that this is good, supremely good, just as he knows that this picture is beautiful, that that landscape is fair.

¹ Rev. John Watson, M.A.

3. Goodness the greatest thing in the world—man's first duty to seek after goodness, the highest goodness revealed to him—that highest goodness incarnate for us in Jesus Christ: what then? *I ought to follow Christ, I ought to be a Christian.*

“But,” some one may ask—and I do not want to rush to a desired conclusion by ignoring all difficulties—“why follow Christ rather than any other great and good man who has ever lived?” Well, I might answer by pointing out the difference—to me an infinite one—between Christ and any other great and good man; but it will be soon enough to discuss this question as soon as any one seriously proposes to give to any man, however great and good, the place in his life which Christ asks and receives in the life of every true Christian.

“But,” it may be urged again, “why follow any one man at all? Why not be disciples of all the great and wise and good? Why this supremacy for Jesus Christ?” And once more I answer—you will forgive me if I speak now in the first person—I would ever be a learner at the feet of all who have aught of truth to teach to man. I prize their words none the less because I have come to value His the more. But if you ask me why I give to Christ the supreme place in my life—a place unshared, unshareable of all besides—I will tell you; I can do no other. I want to do what is right, to love what is good, and with my

whole soul to seek after it. But, *the good which I would, I do not; the evil which I would not, that I do*—there is the great problem of my life. How is it to be solved? I believe, nay, I know, the only answer is here, in following Christ. But, utterly unthinkable to me as it is that I am wrong, yet so entirely real and practical a matter is this, if you can show me a more excellent way, I will take it, here and now.

That brings me to the deepest reason of all. I am a follower of Christ's to-day, not only, not chiefly because in His example is the loftiest standard of human duty, but because—let me still speak in the first person—I have found that what Christ bids me be, He helps me to be. Do you say, "So will any great example help us"? yes, but not as Christ does. He makes his own strength mine. There is the ideal, shining like the stars, like them too, distant; but Christ walks at my side, and aids my stumbling feet up the fearful steep. What other, however great and good, can do that for you? I think if I could have lived with Luther—Luther the strong and the brave—I might have grown strong and brave too. I think if I could have spent the livelong summer day with "sweet St. Francis of Assisi," that pure and gentle spirit who "used to call the very flowers, sisters, brothers," I might have grown pure and gentle too. But they are dead, they are gone, and the past folds them in its ever-thickening mists; but Christ lives! He lives in

them that trust in Him; He lives in them to make them even as He is.

"We cannot follow you there," does some one say? "This is the cloudland of mysticism, where the feet can find no solid ground to tread upon. How can these things be? How can Christ dwell in any man?" Yet I do but speak the simplest fact—a fact witnessed to in the daily lives of multitudes. If you are a Christian, you know what all this means; if you are not, you have no means of knowing, and therefore, remember, no right of judging. Yet than that these things are so, nothing is more certain.

My task is done. Once more I ask—Will you become a Christian? Some of you at least will feel, I hope, the advantage of beginning where I have begun. I have tried to raise no theological difficulties on the threshold. Eternal punishment, the inspiration of the Bible; the creation of the world—these matters can wait. If you mean to be a Christian, we can talk about them by and by; if you do not, really, it is not worth while my discussing them with you. Two things only I ask—Do you want to do what is right? Do you want power to do it? Then obey Christ when He says, "Follow Me."

"Two things only" did I say? Have not some of us a third want? I talked with a lady once about Christ, and she told me she did not feel she needed Him, she knew of nothing she

wanted to be saved from. I advised her to read again the story of the four Gospels, to lay her own life alongside the perfect life that is revealed there, and then to see if still she asked "what lack I yet?" And if any of you to whom I speak feel as she felt, I do not know that I can say anything better to you. But there are some of you who can never speak thus. "Nothing to be saved from" indeed! You have everything to be saved from. You too had your dream of goodness once; but it has faded long ago. Life's morning broke sweet and clear; but that is all far, far away now—

"I remember, I remember
The fir-trees dark and high :
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky.
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from Heaven
Than when I was a boy."

You need no preacher to tell you what sin is; it holds you in its iron grip. If Christ is to be anything to you, He must come, not first as the Perfect Example to be imitated, but as the Great Deliverer who will strike off the chains and set the captive free. It is so He comes; He bends over the weakest and worst of us, and says, "Ye shall receive *power*; follow Me." Follow Him, my brother, and it shall be unto you even according to His word.

MR. GET-I'-THE-HUNDRED-AND-LOSE-
I'-THE-SHIRE

"So Lot chose him all the Plain of Jordan."—GEN. xiii. 11.
"And Esau sold his birthright unto Jacob."—GEN. xxv. 33.

V

MR. GET-I'-THE-HUNDRED-AND-LOSE- I'-THE-SHIRE

AMONG the characters in John Bunyan's *Holy War*, to which Dr. Whyte has just been introducing us in a series of lectures of which it is difficult to speak without seeming to use the language of exaggeration, there is one Mr. Get-i'-the-hundred-and-lose-i'-the-shire. "This man with the long name," as Bunyan truly enough calls him, is introduced in this connection: the princes of the pit took counsel together how they might destroy the town of Mansoul. And when they saw that their only hope lay in their being able to lead the townsmen into sin, "they fell to inventing by what means they might do this thing." Then Lucifer stood up and spoke. "You know," he said, "Mansoul is a market-town and a town that delights in commerce, what therefore if some of our Diabolonians shall feign themselves for countrymen, and shall go out and bring to the market of Mansoul some of our wares to sell—and what

matter at what rates they sell their wares, though it be but for half the worth? Now let those that thus shall trade in their market be those that are witty and true to us, and I will lay my crown to pawn, it will do. There are two that are come to my thoughts already that I think will be arch at this work, and they are Mr. Penny-wise-pound-foolish and Mr. Get-i'-the-hundred-and-lose-i'-the-shire; nor is this man with the long name at all inferior to the other. What also if you join with them, Mr. Sweet-world and Mr. Present-good? . . . Let those, with as many more, engage in this business for us, and let Mansoul be taken up in much business, and let them grow rich and full, and this is the way to get ground of them."

Let us look at this "man with the long name." Every reader of the *Pilgrim's Progress* is familiar with Bunyan's gift of happy characterization. He hits off a character in a phrase. One stroke of his inimitable pencil and the portrait is complete. So is it here: know this man's name and you know him. But what is the meaning of the remarkable name that he bears? Dr. Whyte's exposition leaves nothing to be desired. A "shire," of course, is a county. "Hundred" is the name of one of the old subdivisions of the English counties, so called because each was supposed to contain one hundred free families. The word still lingers in the familiar "Chiltern Hundreds" that meets us so often in the daily paper. In early times the forest-clad slopes of the Chiltern Hills were infested with robbers.

To put down their depredations, an officer under the Crown was appointed who bore the title "Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds," the "hundreds" in this case being three of the subdivisions of the county of Buckinghamshire. The office, of course, has long been a sinecure, but it still exists, and is used to meet certain well-known political exigencies.

The meaning of the title of my address is now, I hope, perfectly clear. A hundred is but a fraction of a shire ; therefore, to get in the hundred and lose in the shire means to secure the less and let go the greater ; it is to be penny-wise and pound-foolish ; it is to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage ; it is to win the "corruptible crown" and to miss "the crown of glory that fadeth not away" ; it is to gain the whole world and to lose our own soul.

For concrete illustrations let us turn to the two Old Testament stories of Lot and Esau.

Take first Lot's choice of Sodom. A strife had arisen, you remember, between the herdmen of Lot's cattle and the herdmen of Abraham's cattle. Abraham, with equal good sense and generosity, proposes an immediate solution of the difficulty. "Let there be no strife, I pray thee," he said to Lot, "between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee ? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me : if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right ;

or if thou wilt take the right hand, then I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the Plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere . . . like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar." And as Lot had his cattle to think about, what more could he want than that? The plain was well watered—that settled everything: "So Lot chose him all the Plain of Jordan." Poor blind fool that he was! He saw the well-watered plain, and after that he had eyes for nothing else. But was there, therefore, nothing else to be seen? Listen: "Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the Lord exceedingly." But Lot never stopped to ask questions about that. Sodom and Gomorrah might be a moral dunghill; but was there not fat pasturage for his flocks and herds? He and his wife and his children might drink in poison with every breath they drew in that sin-drenched atmosphere; but what of that if the cattle were well fed? Passing strange, is it not, that men will not begin to think of the greater things of life till first its smaller gifts have been struck from their hands; that they will not covet something better than the well-watered plain, till it lies behind them a smoking, desolate waste?

Turn now to the story of Esau, who sold, "for one mess of meat" (as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews half scornfully puts it¹) his own birthright.

¹ xii. 16.

Now I do not want to deny that there was anything that was good in the character of Esau. His open frankness, his quick impulsive generosity, his bold impetuosity of spirit, would naturally make him popular with his roystering boon companions. I think Esau was exactly the kind of man that to-day we call "a jolly good fellow." And when we think merely of that side of his character, we can hardly be surprised that he is so often favourably contrasted with his sleek, smooth-tongued, but double-dealing brother Jacob. And yet when we come to look well into the heart of the man, what do we find but one who is the mere plaything of his animal passions, ready to barter away everything he has, if only he can satisfy the appetite of the moment? Esau could not see one inch beyond the present. He never stopped to ask himself whether by gratifying the desire of to-day he was not thereby forfeiting a far greater blessing which might possibly come to him to-morrow. The old proverb says, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"; yes, Esau would have said, twenty or two hundred—everything must go for present enjoyment. Self-control for the sake of future good was a thing of which this wild, passionate man never dreamed. If he comes in hot and hungry from the field, he must have something to eat, and if he does not get it there and then he is quite sure he is going to die, and even though the price he has to pay for it be his birthright, the loss of which he will feel all his life, nevertheless the

present craving gets the mastery, and the next moment the mess of pottage and the birthright have changed hands. Whenever the means of gratifying passion was close at hand, and the lower self in Esau said, "I want it," self-restraint never moved a finger to keep the two apart, let the penalty be what it might.

"What folly!" you say, "what blindness! Did ever a man in his senses betray such stupid indifference to his own best interests?" But stay a moment; you are pitying Esau—are you quite sure the devil's hook is not sticking in your own jaws? You think that elder brother a fool for selling his birthright for a mess of pottage, when ten minutes' patience might have got him all he wanted; and you are right, but I tell you there are some of you who are doing exactly the same thing almost every day you live. Whenever a man lets go his hold on a higher, greater good, in order to snatch at a lower, he makes Lot's choice over again, he repeats poor Esau's stupid blunder. Let me point out some of the ways in which we young men are doing this to-day; and for once, at least, I will follow apostolic example, and "use great plainness of speech."

Take the question of amusements.¹ Sport in itself is a good thing, but loved as some of you are coming to love it, it is a mischievous, a deadly thing. Every young man should have his favourite pastime, his cricket or football, or golf, or cycling;

¹ Referred to again on page 227.

but having a favourite pastime ought not to mean, that the only part of the daily paper we care about is the column of sporting intelligence. Clearly it is our duty to take care of our health, to maintain our bodily strength in full vigour ; but have we not other and higher duties too—duties to our own higher self, duties to our fellows, duties to our God? And to make amusements, the chief concern of our life, to put the italics there, is to sell our birthright for a paltry mess of pottage, it is to lose a very big shire for the sake of a very small hundred.

Or take again the question of reading, and is not pretty much the same thing true? There are some of you who have not read one serious book, one book which has cost you ten minutes' hard thinking, or added anything to the stores of your intellectual life, during all the last twelve months. It has all been snips from the rag-bag of literature, the daily paper, the popular magazine, the light novel. And as Ruskin says, when you might have been holding converse with the kings and queens of literature, you have been content to gossip with your housemaid or your stable-boy. I do not forget the many whose days are filled with dull, exacting toil, and who if they read at all, can only do so to find some quick and easy escape from the mill-horse round of daily toil. It is not of such as these that I am speaking now ; but some of you there are who are so misusing the opportunities that every day brings you, that your

powers of thought are becoming permanently weakened, and there is perhaps no time that is more utterly wasted than the time that you spend in reading. You are throwing away a pound for a very doubtful penny ; you are losing a shire for the sake of a hundred, that is not worth the having even when you get it.

Perhaps I speak to some who are just about to choose for themselves a business or profession. Take care lest you fall into the same pit as Lot. Before you turn your face to Sodom and Gomorrah—to the promising situation in London or Glasgow—learn about something more than the well-watered plain. There may be a good wage and better prospects, but if they are only to be had at the price Lot paid for them, you had better break stones on the roadside. Nobody will misunderstand me, I hope, if I say that there are some professions in life in themselves honourable enough, yet *for some* so beset with dangers, that they will do well to think not twice only, but twenty times before they embark in them. It is not every young man, *e.g.*, who ought to think of becoming a commercial traveller. I am casting no reflections on a large and estimable body of men ; but I know of what I speak, and those who best know the peculiar temptations of life “on the road” will bear me out when I say that there are many young men, fitted perhaps in all other respects, whose moral fibre is unequal to the strain which such a life puts upon it. Take care that you do

not risk the shire for the sake of the hundred. If you make your choice as Lot made his, you will pay the same penalty. God help us to be wise before the fiery hail of His judgment is about our ears!

And you who are already in business, are you getting in the hundred and losing in the shire? What about your advertising, for instance? Is it honest advertising, or is it what we call "puffing"? You shopkeepers, Christ wants to look at your window-bills and your circulars. Let us spread them out here before Him in church, and then sing our hymns and offer our prayers. And as to the things you sell, would it trouble you if you knew that only last night He stood among your customers, you served Him across your counter? Are you offering nothing to the least of these His brethren you would be ashamed to offer Him? I judge no man; let every man judge himself. And if neither Christ nor your own conscience condemn you, who am I that I should sit in judgment over you? But this I say to you, that if your grocer's license, or your drink-shop, or your brewery shares, or your transactions on the Stock Exchange are making you uneasy, and you are trying to hush the barking of conscience with this sop, "There's money in it, there's money in it," then beware lest thy money and thy business and thou perish together, and thou lose both the hundred of the life that now is, and the shire of that which is to come.

Here, then, are some of the ways in which men to-day are repeating the folly of Lot and Esau. How may we save ourselves from it? There are two things I want to say.

1. *Think*.—"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" asks the psalmist. Mark the answer: "*By taking heed thereto* according to Thy word." Carlyle summed up the teaching of Goethe in this one pregnant word, *Gedenke, zu leben*, "think, to live," "think about living." Is it not a word we all need to lay to heart? "My people doth not consider," therefore God still has His controversy with us. We are the mere children of impulse, never stopping to think, to weigh, to consider. Down we go on our knees in the mud before the great goddess of "Getting on," and no man of us stops to ask what is the price she inevitably demands and exacts from her worshippers. There lies the well-watered plain, and our choice is made with the stink of its foulness in our nostrils even as we make it. We are hungry, and there is the mess of pottage—enough! enough! let the birthright go. Did you ever study the wise man's picture of the foolish youth going down to the chambers of death: "He goeth as an ox goeth to the slaughter, till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life"? Think! young man, think! For how, except you "think on your ways," will you ever "turn your feet unto His testimonies"?

2. *Look at life whole.*—Learn to estimate things at their true worth. Remember the present and immediate is not everything ; give it its place, but see that it gets no more than its place. Do not lose the shire to-morrow for the sake of the hundred to-day. Nothing is so difficult as, and nothing is more important than, so to learn the right relative worth of things. The present always bulks large to the eye, not because it is large, but just because it is present. The future seems insignificant, not because it is really so, but because it is far away and remote. A mountain that is a mile off does not shut out so much of the sky as an eight-foot wall that is close by your side. Ask Esau, when he is not hungry, which he values the more, a mess of pottage or his birth-right, and he will laugh at you. Ask him when the fierce appetite has seized upon him, and he will say to you as he did to Jacob, “What profit shall this birthright do to me?” That is the temptation that assails us all, the temptation to forget all higher, spiritual good in our eagerness to snatch at the baubles and trifles that dangle before our eyes. Be on your guard and do not weakly yield to every impulse of the moment.

There is a poem that some of us used to read in our schooldays of an old man telling to a child the story of some great battle ; and ever and again the little maid stops him with the question, “But what came of it all at the last?” That is just the question I want us each to ask ourselves ;

if I keep straight on in the way I am going, what will come of it at the last? "What will ye do in the end thereof?"—it is a prophet's question; would that with a prophet's power I could force it home! "In the end thereof," when tendency has hardened into fact, when causes have worked their way round to effects, when seed-time has issued in harvest—then, what? My brother, do not go on in the dark; at least, know what you are about. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." "The end thereof"—do you ever think of that? "He that getteth riches"—is that you?—"and not by right"—is that you also? then listen—"shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool." "The bread of falsehood is sweet to a man"—have you learned that? then hear once again—"but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel." I warn you, there is poison in that jewelled cup that sin has put to your lips. There is a deadly serpent coiled among the flowers that strew the pathway of evil. There is a sting within the tempter's honeyed sweets. Sodom and Gomorrah have their well-watered plains, but beneath all that smiling beauty there sleeps the dread volcano with its awful powers of red ruin and of death. All may seem well to-day, for sin is an arch deceiver, but "*at the last* it biteth like a serpent, it stingeth like an adder."

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and

let my last end be like his!"—do you ever pray that prayer? Then, like the good Bishop Andrewes, make it your daily prayer too, that you may be wise and consider your latter end. So shall it be well with you at the last.

THE MANLINESS OF CHRIST

*"And when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John . . .
they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." —*
ACTS iv. 13.

VI

THE MANLINESS OF CHRIST

TO those of us who believe in God and in the importance of putting our lives in a right relation to Him and to His truth, there is no more painful fact than the comparative estrangement of the manhood of Europe, and—though of course in a lesser degree—of our own country, too, from the religion of Jesus Christ. That such estrangement exists is, I fear, beyond dispute. I have seen it stated—I do not know on what authority—that two-thirds of the membership of Christendom are women. The estimate may or may not be correct ; it is certainly no misrepresentation of the facts as far as I have been able to observe them. I have noted carefully the judgment of men far better qualified to speak than I am ; I have looked over Church year-books and membership returns ; I have narrowly watched congregations both from the pulpit and the pew ; I have even counted them as they were dispersing after service, and almost always with the same result. I do not forget the splendid exceptions that are still

happily to be found in every part of the land ; but I am convinced that no one can take an impartial survey of any considerable part of our modern Church life without finding the question forced upon him at every turn with painful monotony, "Where are the men?" It was stated by one of the speakers at the last annual gathering¹ of the Young Men's Christian Associations of Scotland, that of the members of Christian families in connection with our Churches, from twenty to thirty per cent fewer men than women join the Church before the age of twenty. The estrangement of the working classes from the Churches may perhaps have been over-stated in some quarters ; but is it possible to mistake the sad significance of the question asked to-day on every hand, "Why don't working men go to church?" Nor is non-churchgoing among men by any means confined to any one class of the community, though the great preponderance of the labouring classes may easily justify the turn which any discussion of this problem usually takes. The late James Macdonell, *c.g.*, used to say that of all the journalists and men of letters whom he knew in London, there was not one who believed in Christianity.²

Speaking generally, I do not think this indicates any deep or wide-spread hostility to the

¹ In 1893.

² See the admirable life of this brilliant young journalist by Dr. Robertson Nicoll of the *British Weekly*.

Churches. I am just old enough to remember the day when fears were commonly expressed as to the probable outcome of the extreme anti-religious movement associated with the name of the late Charles Bradlaugh. The probability is, as has been more than once pointed out, that the secret of Mr. Bradlaugh's influence always lay rather in his political than in his infidel views. Be that as it may, now that Bradlaugh and the *National Reformer* are no more, and Mrs. Besant has gone over to Theosophy, and "Halls of Science" all over the land are being either shut up or turned to different uses, the coarse, blustering Atheism of a quarter of a century ago is to-day a discredited force amongst us.¹ Nor is it likely that the militant type of Agnosticism represented by Professor Huxley will be ever more than the intellectual fashion of the few. No; the majority of non-churchgoers have no hard words to say against Christianity; they do not attack it; they do not sneer at it; they severely let it alone. That which baffles us is not hostility, but indifference. Men simply do not care. Here on the one hand are our churches, our ministers, our vast and complex organisation for bringing the Gospel home to the hearts and

¹ It is a pleasure to find the substance of what I have here said confirmed by Principal Fairbairn in his luminous essay on "The Church and the Working Classes," prefixed to the new edition of his *Religion in History and in Modern Life*, which I have read since the above was written.

consciences of men, and yet the only response among multitudes which it seems to evoke is—“Well, this is no concern of ours; you go your way, we will go ours.” The thought that these two ways should anywhere meet appears never to enter their minds.

Perhaps some one will say, “This is all probably true, and it is of no great consequence. Men are not necessarily less religious because they have given up going to church.” One eminent religious teacher has even gone so far as to say, “Many have left the Church in order to be Christians.” Possibly; but we are quite ready enough nowadays to assume the existence of Christianity outside the Churches. Perhaps there is less of it than some would have us suppose. But however that may be, and whatever may be true of individuals here and there, for most of us, we shall cease to think of God when we cease to care for the public worship of God.

Why is it, then, that the majority of men are outside all the Churches? I have raised—not without purpose—a much larger question than I can attempt to answer. Indeed, my answer will be of the most fractional character. I pass by all the matter usually adverted to in this connection in order to fix attention upon one point not so frequently considered. It is this: many are alienated from Christianity because they have never realised that *the ideal Christian life and the ideal manly life are one and the same thing*. The

indifference noted above is not indifference to goodness—if that were so one might indeed despair—rather it is indifference to what seems to be only a form of goodness, and that neither the highest nor the best worth cultivating. Explain it as we like, and lay the blame where we may, the reason why scores of young men hold aloof from Christianity is a feeling that somehow or other a profession of religion will rob them of something of their true manliness. Now, if there is one thing that a young fellow hates more than another it is to be thought weak and “womanish.” He will go a long way sometimes towards making a fool of himself, but he will never, if he knows it, do aught that will lead his companions to think him “soft.”

But, unfortunately, this is the very thing which in the minds of many is associated with religion. Why is it that our Young Men’s Christian Associations so often touch but the merest fringe of the great constituency to which they make their appeal? It is because, rightly or wrongly, they have come to be regarded by many as nurseries for little Pharisees, the last stronghold of effeminacy and cant.¹ And so intense is his abhorrence of anything that savours of sanctimoniousness, that it has come to pass that a young man to-

¹ This is not intended as an expression of the writer’s own judgment on Young Men’s Christian Associations as a whole. He is only stating, without endorsing, an opinion which he knows to be pretty widely held.

day resents being called "pious" almost as much as he would being thought mean and shabby. Would there were no ground in actual fact for this unhappy misconception! Unfortunately, there are all too many unmanly Christians. Everybody knows Sydney Smith's three sexes—men, women, and clergymen! And I suppose we are all familiar with the picture, sketched by a hundred novelists, of the "nice" young curate—some dapper little dandy with faultlessly white hands and pretty mincing ways.

Yes; but if there are unmanly Christians, read your New Testament and tell me if you find there an unmanly Christ. Christ is the ideal of religion. I preach not to make you like me or any man, but like Him. To make men Christ-like—that on its practical side is the whole aim of Christianity. And what I want you to see is this, that he who seeks to realise this aim in his own life is taking the shortest possible road to the fulfilment of all his own best desires for a high and holy manhood. However the followers of Christ may have misrepresented and wronged Him, it yet remains true that Jesus of Nazareth is the highest type of truest manliness our world has ever seen. Therefore, if you would do all that may become a man, if you would be brave and true, and strong and tender, if, in Milton's magnificent phrase, you would learn "to hate the cowardice of doing wrong," follow Him.

And now, after this long preamble, let me turn

back to my text and illustrate what I have been saying from the incident to which it refers. This is one of the texts which rarely gets justice at the hands of those who quote it. I have heard it on the lips of good people hundreds of times, but never, so far as I remember, with any reference to its true significance. We pray for love, for meekness, for holiness, and that so men may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and it is well that we should pray thus. Nevertheless, it was none of these things in the disciples that reminded their enemies of Christ. It was when they saw the *boldness* of Peter and John that they said "they have been with Jesus."

Read the narrative in the Acts over again. Peter and John had been cast into prison "because they taught the people." In the morning they were brought before the Sanhedrim. Mark Peter's answer to their question. He will not budge an inch; he bates not one jot or tittle of the lofty claims they had already made for Christ; he even bluntly charges his judges with Christ's death—"whom ye crucified." Do you wonder that the court sat in astonishment at the prisoner's boldness? Is not that exactly our own feeling? If we had read the story in our morning paper instead of the Bible, should we not have said, "Well, that was a manly, plucky thing to do"?

But what I want you especially to notice is the explanation that the rulers give of the conduct of Peter and John—*they put it all down*

to Jesus: "When they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." I do not suppose they meant it exactly as a compliment. They remembered Jesus and they hated Him. Perhaps among the seventy there were some who could never forget how once His words like a plough-share had ripped up the surface of their lives, and laid bare the rotting foulness underneath; and now in these men's words they seem to catch an echo of His own bold and fearless tones: "Yes," they said with a sneer, and a glance into each other's faces, "they have been with Jesus, and this is what has come of it." But in whatever sense we take the words, this at least is clear—on the confession of the enemies of Christ themselves, being with Jesus had made His disciples bold. Boldness certainly is not quite the same thing as manliness, but if Christ can teach weak men courage, is it not possible also that He may teach them "*all that makes a man*"? Let us turn for a moment or two to the story of His life and see if this be not so. I will mention one or two of the facts which illustrate for us the true manliness of Christ.

1. Take first the point to which reference has already been made, His *moral courage*. "We know that Thou art true," said His enemies, "and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one: for Thou regardest not the person of men." It was but the vain flattery of wicked men

who sought to catch Him in His talk ; yet none knew better than themselves how true their words were. Neither in deed nor in word did He regard the person of man. One of the first acts of His public ministry was to enter into the Temple where the bargainers and money-changers carried on their unholy traffic, and with a whip of small cords, single-handed, to lash them from the house of God. See with what simple fearlessness He tells His enemies the ugly truth about themselves, in the very moment when they are going about to kill Him : "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. . . . Ye have not known God : but I know Him ; and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be like unto you a liar." Or watch Him, again, in Pilate's judgment-hall ; what a contrast between the Prisoner, so calm in the presence of horrible death, so kingly even in His humiliation, and the Roman governor flitting nervously to and fro, asking hurried questions, not knowing his own mind for two moments together ! When Pilate heard the saying, "He made himself the Son of God," he was the more afraid, and entering again into the palace, he saith unto Jesus, "Whence art thou ?" But Jesus gave him no answer. "Speakest Thou not unto me ? Knowest Thou not that I have power to release Thee and have power to crucify Thee ?" "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above : therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin."

Tell me, young men, what think ye of this Christ? Can we make Him our Lord and Master; can we serve and follow Him, and yet be shrinking, craven-hearted cowards?

2. Note, further, Christ's *steadfastness of purpose*. "The characteristic of heroism," says Emerson, "is persistency. All men have wandering impulses, fits and starts of generosity. But when you have chosen your part, abide by it, and do not weakly try to reconcile yourself with the world." Try Christ's life by that test and see what is the result. "To this end have I been born," He said, "and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." He knew for what He lived; He had sighted the goal from the beginning; His path to it lay straight as an arrow's flight. We read of Him once that His face was "set to go to Jerusalem." It is a picture of His whole life. One wonders that some artist, instead of repeating over and over again one or two incidents in the life of our Saviour, has not thrown that wonderful scene on the canvas for us: "The Christ, with knitted brow and tightened lips, and far-off gazing eyes, 'steadfastly setting His face to go to Jerusalem,' and followed as He pressed up the rocky road from Jericho by that wondering group, astonished at the rigidity of purpose that was stamped on His features."¹

So was it to the very last. Humanity flinched

¹ Dr. Maclaren.

for a moment in Gethsemane when the hot iron pressed into His flesh ; it was but for a moment ; follow Him on the day of crucifixion, from Caiaphas to Pilate's judgment-hall, from Pilate to Herod, from Herod back again to Pilate, and so on to Calvary, and there is no sign of wavering or irresolution, none even of impatience or murmuring.

3. And yet, perhaps, we never truly feel how nobly strong Christ was until we have seen how in Him strength united with the most wonderfully delicate *refinement of feeling and perfection of sympathy*. What "patience and abnegation of self and devotion to others"! Even though we do not go beyond the few hours before His death, what tender thoughtfulness, what self-forgetting love! "Whom seek ye?" He said to His enemies, as they came to take Him by the brook Kedron. "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am He: but if ye seek Me"—and then He turned to the little band of frightened men at His side—"let these go their way." Again, as He trod the Via Dolorosa, and faithful women followed Him, shedding hot tears of helpless grief, it was not for Himself that He would have them mourn: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but for yourselves and your children." Even amid the terrible and unimaginable experiences of the cross, His thought is not of self, but of others: "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He

to the disciple, Behold thy mother." And, so wondrous is that love, it gathers within its mighty sweep the mother that bare Him and the men that murdered Him, and He prays, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do."

Christ Jesus is the perfect Man; for true manliness can stoop as well as soar; it knows how to be gentle and unresisting, and how to be bold and self-assertive; it can forgive and forbear, as it can also be angry and condemn. Tennyson sings of "that gentleness which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man." "My knights," says the noble Arthur, "are sworn to vows of utter hardihood, utter gentleness." And where do that utter hardihood and utter gentleness meet and blend as in the life of Jesus?

"Thou seem'st both human and divine,
The highest, holiest manhood Thou."

And shall we say—we young men—that to serve *this* Man is to rob us of aught of our manhood? Rather may we not be sure that he who will yield himself to this Christ to love and follow Him, shall find that there is no stronger power under heaven

"Not only to keep down the base in man,
But to teach high thought, and amiable words,
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and *all that makes a man*?"

Have I not said enough? Do you still think that to be "pious" is to be weak, that to be "good"

is to be goody-goody, to be "saintly" is to be sanctimonious? Then turn from the Gospels for a moment, and take down your histories and biographies from the bookshelf. "We Germans," said Prince Bismarck once in a characteristic epigram, "fear God, and nothing else in the world." And I venture to affirm that you will find the most splendid examples of simple fearlessness and heroic self-devotion among those who have counted it their chiefest joy to call Christ Jesus Lord. Look at Peter; but yesterday he turned pale at the jibes of a saucy servant-maid; now he stands before the Sanhedrim, and beards the whole seventy of them, without even a thought that he is doing a big thing. It was by the grave of John Knox that the Earl of Morton stood when he said, "He lies there who never feared the face of man." "Play the man, Master Ridley," cried honest Hugh Latimer as the flames leapt about him, "we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England as I trust shall never be put out." Who has not cried over the story of John Brown, the abolitionist martyr, kissing the little black babe as it lay in its mother's arms, on his way to the scaffold, then mounting the steps to die with a thanksgiving on his lips that he was counted worthy to suffer in such a cause.¹ The time would fail me to tell of Havelock falling amid the agonies of the Indian Mutiny; of Livingstone and

¹ Emerson used to say that his judgment on any man depended on that man's judgment on John Brown of Harper's Ferry.

Mackay, pouring out the precious treasure of their lives like water on the burning wastes of Africa ; of Gordon, meeting death with unblanched cheek in the fastnesses of far-away Khartoum. And if these "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire," with them also was it not "through faith"—faith in Christ as Lord? Do not all their lives invite us to take knowledge of them that they too have been with Jesus?

We need such men to-day ; nay, rather, may I not say, such men we want to be? And remember—to quote Emerson once more—though "times of heroism are generally times of terror, yet the day never shines in which that element may not work." Circumstances have changed ; we do not now "run against an axe at the first step out of the beaten track of opinion. But whoso is heroic will always find crises to try his edge."

This word above all let us lay to heart—all that Peter and John gained by communion and fellowship with Christ we may gain too. For—to say over again what I have so often said before—Christ enables us to be what He bids us be, what He shows us we ought to be. That is why He is so much more than an example. Gordon can give me an example of true bravery : Gordon cannot make me brave. Livingstone and Mackay can show me what self-sacrifice really

means : Livingstone and Mackay cannot cast out the devil of selfishness from within me.

“Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime”—

Yes, yes ; but they can stretch out no strong hand to lift us to their own glittering heights. And if the Gospel can only tell us of a perfect example to be copied, then for ninety-nine out of every hundred of us it can be no Gospel, no “good news” at all. If it puts before us the life of the human Jesus and says, “Imitate that,” and after that has no more that it can do, then is our last case worse almost than the first ; our ideal is heightened immeasurably, our power remains what it was. But, thank God, He who is our example is also our new life. Christ is not only *there*, without me, as pattern ; He is also *here*, within me, as power. Name your heroes in literature and history ; there is not one of them who can share his own powers with you. Christ can and does. We may live in Him and He in us, and all the forces that wrought in Him may work in our lives too. Young men, there is but one source of abiding strength ; it is here—“Be strengthened *in the Lord*” ; will you seek it ?

TEMPTATION

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the tree of the garden we may eat: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil."—GEN. iii. 1-5.

VII

TEMPTATION¹

MY subject is Temptation. Is it not a significant fact that this is one of the first things that meets us in the Bible? No sooner does God's word begin to speak of man than it has something to say of temptation. Read of him and you read of it. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" There, before you have reached the bottom of the first page of man's history, there it is—*temptation*.

Temptation is a universal fact in life. There are subjects of which the preacher must speak that lie wholly outside the life of some; there are experiences with which he must seek to deal that to some are wholly foreign. It is necessarily so; every sermon is not for everybody. But when I speak of temptation, I miss nobody. No two faces are exactly alike; and our lives are as individual as our faces. But be the differences

¹ I am indebted for some suggestions on this subject to an admirable address by Professor Drummond,

that separate us what they may, we are alike in this, we are all tempted. Temptation, like sorrow and pain and death, is one of the great common-places of our life.

True, our temptations are not all the same; for temptation is not only a universal thing, it is an individual thing. It marks a difference in lives that to all outward seeming are one. The wife has her temptations, and the husband his. Children of the same parents, living under the same roof-tree, moulded by the same influences, have yet each their own individual life-history. To some the tempter comes as a strong man armed, laying rough and violent hands upon us; to some as an angel of light, whispering honeyed words of peace. To some he is, in the Apostle's strong phrase, "as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour"; more often he comes as the subtle serpent, first fascinating us with its glittering eye, and then slowly winding its slimy length, coil after coil, about our life. Yes; some are tempted in one way and some in another, but *nobody escapes*. To-day I may be shielded when you are exposed; to-morrow will redress the balance. For, here at least, there are no privileged classes. Temptation is no respecter of person. Pay down what ransom-money you will, there is no buying yourself off. You may be rich; but for every door that wealth shuts in the face of temptation, it opens another, often two. You may be a student living among your books, with the thoughts of the wisest and best

as your companions every day, and yet this very thing may prove to you, as it has to many before you, the snare of intellectual selfishness, and light from heaven may be the light that leads astray. You may become a minister and think that there, at least, is the way of escape ; but I tell you that the swifter and the deadlier will be the hail of the shafts of the Evil One upon you. You may even refuse to run the gauntlet of life : you may flee into the wilderness, and seek to escape from life altogether ; yet even there temptation will find you out. I have read of St. Anthony, how that when his wild gay life in Alexandria was checked by his conversion, he turned his back upon the city, and sought, for safety, the solitude of the desert ; but he soon returned. The temptations of the city may be bad, he said ; the temptations of the hermit's cell in the wilderness are worse. No ; there is no escape. It is the testimony of the best and holiest of men : "the life of man upon earth is a life of temptation." Says Bunyan in his own quaint phrase, "The devil did not play in tempting of me." Says the saintly Thomas à Kempis, "There is no order so holy, nor place so secret, as that there be not temptations in it." Even an Apostle declares, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." And the Perfect Life was a tempted life, tempted perhaps as some of us have never realised. We speak of the temptation in the wilderness as if the struggle ended with the forty days. It was not so that Jesus thought of

His life. "Ye are they," He said to His disciples, "which have continued with Me in My temptations." Yet the disciples were not with Jesus in the wilderness, and when these words were spoken Gethsemane was still before Him. Christ looks at His life that lay between the wilderness and the garden, and He calls it "My temptations." The great Californian Observatory is built thousands of feet above the sea, and the room in which the observer works rests on long stone piers sunk to a great depth into the earth, in order to prevent any vibrations which might vitiate the observations and calculations of the worker. But if there be any such spot in our moral world, above the shock and tremor of our life, I do not know where it is to be found; I know none who dwell there. Do you ask why this is so? Thomas à Kempis shall tell us. "There is no man," he says, "that is altogether free from temptation whilst he liveth on earth; *for the root thereof is in ourselves.*" And a man will escape from temptation when, and only when he is able to escape from himself.

If any one wishes to go further into the "why and wherefore" of temptation, I cannot now follow him. Why, if God is good and almighty, does evil exist? How came the serpent in the garden? This is a question I cannot discuss. For myself I am content to take things as I find them, and to believe that it is best that they should be so. There are, I know, certain wise ones who would fain persuade us that had it only been granted unto them, the

wise ones, to have had a hand in the creation of the world, things might have been much better arranged. I doubt it. A well-known novelist was once discussing a kindred problem with a friend of mine, when he summed up his view of the case thus : " Well, for my part," said he, " I back the engineer against the stoker." And so do I,—with apologies, if need be, for the unconventional phraseology. I believe that He who planned and made the world, the Divine " Engineer," knew best what was good for it,—better than we who live in it, " work " it, are, so to speak, the " stokers " of it. But be that as it may, temptation exists. And he is the wiser man, not who seeks by puny premiss and syllogism to demonstrate that it ought never to have been, but who frankly accepts the fact, and manfully seeks to shape his life accordingly.

Let me remind you, then,—and remember I am dealing with the question wholly from the practical point of view,—that it is given unto us by the power of a Divine alchemy *to turn our greatest temptations into our greatest blessings*. " The greatest of all temptations," said an old Puritan divine, " is to be without any." What did he mean? This, that if it were possible for us to make our bed of roses, to lie all our days " in the lilies of life ;" that if it were always fair weather and blue sky, and wind and tide were always with us, no worse thing could befall us. If God had so ordered it that it cost us much to do wrong and nothing to do right, whence would come the stuff

out of which true manhood is made? How are the sinews of the soul to grow and harden in a long Italian summer of unbroken ease and idle calm? We look at temptation on the one side, and we see only possible sin and shame and disgrace. But now look at it on the other side, and a wholly new set of possibilities come into view: the eye quickened, the nerve steadied, the whole soul braced and strengthened. Temptation is God's great factory wherein He makes men and women.

We all know what is meant by atmospheric pressure. That pressure amounts, roughly speaking, to fifteen pounds to the square inch; so that a full-grown man sustains a pressure, acting, of course, equally in all directions, of not less than fourteen tons. Now watch the little lark as it rises higher and higher till it is lost in the blue, "a sightless song"; the atmosphere that presses at every point of its tiny body is its stay; without it, it would fall helpless; borne up upon it it is able to soar to the very gateways of the morn. Is it not a parable of our life? We are compassed about with temptations, yet may we make of them stepping stones to higher things.

"Why comes temptation, but for man to meet
And master, and make crouch beneath his feet,
And so be pedestalled in triumph?"¹

"Temptations," says Bunyan, "when we meet them at first are as the lion that roared upon

¹ Browning.

Samson ; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them we shall find a nest of honey within them." So we begin to understand that hard saying : "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."

But let no man twist this into the devil's doctrine that therefore we may play the part of tempter and it will not matter. Temptations must indeed come, but woe, Christ's woe, unto that man by whom they come ! That is a word that is never out of season, especially for you who live in a great city. Never a week, never a day passes but some young man leaves his village home for the big town. Did you ever think of this, that perhaps those who will influence him most are you amongst whom his first friendships or companionships are formed ? What is that influence going to be ? Will you drag some fresh young life through the slime of your own sin ? Will you not rather, by God's grace, twine your strength about its weakness and hold it up ? There are two in our life who are contending for the mastery. The one we call "Tempter" ; the other we call "Saviour." On whose side do you mean to be ? I tell you it were better for you that you had never been born than that some day some poor, feeble, shambling wretch should lay a trembling hand upon your shoulder and hiss in your ear, "I am damned, and you are to thank for it !"

I have said that our temptations may prove a

blessing to us ; but that, of course, depends on what we do with them. Let me add a few words, therefore, on overcoming temptation.

1. Will you understand me when I say that there are times when it is best not to fight but to run away? "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Undoubtedly, but sometimes, if you are a wise man, like Joseph from the presence of Potiphar's wife, you will do all the "fleeing" yourself, and leave the devil in possession of the field. That may not sound very heroic counsel, but under certain circumstances it is, I am persuaded, the best. If a young man is bitten with the betting and gambling mania, he will not, unless he be a fool, run into temptation hoping to fight his way through it; he will keep out of harm's way, and give it as wide a berth as he can. If drink be his foe, he will not idly risk a fall; he will take care not to go where the drink is; and if an invitation comes to be one of a party where the cup—for him the cup of death—is certain to be passed round, then if he be a wise man he will contrive somehow to decline. Do not say this is cowardice; it is simply prudence. Where the stakes are life and death, a man should play only when he must. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away." To overcome some temptations, that is at once the simplest and the safest way.

2. *Resist the beginnings of evil.*—Let us turn once more to Thomas à Kempis, that so great master in the deep things of the spirit. This is how he analyses temptation: "First there cometh to the mind a bare thought of evil, then a strong imagination thereof, afterwards delight and evil emotion, and then consent." Note the various steps: first, a bare thought of evil, then a strong imagination thereof, then delight, and finally consent. First "a bare thought of evil"; that is not sinful, that is simply to be tempted, and to be tempted is not to sin. It is when the "bare thought" passes into the "strong imagination" that the danger begins. "Our great security against sin," says a great student of human nature,¹ "lies in being shocked at it." But when we allow our mind to hover about the forbidden thing, and our imagination to picture it until we grow accustomed to the thought of it, we are breaking down our first and strongest safeguard against evil. That "bare thought" of sin, young man, rid your mind of its presence. Trifle with it, and before you know it you may be over the precipice! Watch the beginnings of evil. Resist the enemy "at the very gate, on his first knocking."² Afterwards it may be too late.

And do not forget that every victory means added strength for further conquest. We are familiar enough with the opposite side of the truth; we know how evil waxes stronger with

¹ J. H. Newman.

² Thomas à Kempis.

every triumph. "Thou shalt deny Me *thrice*"—thrice, not once only, for Jesus knew sin's terrible cumulative power. Yet that is only half the truth. There is a cumulative power in moral good as well as in moral evil. According to an old Red Indian superstition, whenever one of their braves scalped an enemy, the strength of the victim passed into the arm of his murderer. That old and bloody superstition may be a parable of our moral conflict. "Each victory will help you some other to win."

3. Resist, then, the beginnings of evil. And yet even this is not enough; it is too exclusively negative, and no man ever fought successfully the battle of life with none but negative principles as his weapons. In this, as in other things, we must overcome evil with good. If we would die unto sin, we must live unto God. If we would cease to do evil, we must learn to do well. The devil's tares always flourish best in an unsown soil; good wheat will keep them out better than much weeding. If a room is barred and shuttered at midday, it is useless to try to bale out the darkness; fling back the door and shutters and let the light stream in. And you can never empty your heart of evil by main force; only the light can overcome the darkness. Was not that the meaning of Dr. Chalmers' famous and profoundly true phrase—"the expulsive power of a new affection"? Just as when spring comes, and a new life is bursting from every branch of the tree, the old and withered

leaves drop off of themselves, so if we fill our minds and hearts with the things that are pure and lovely and of good report, the desire for what is base and selfish and unclean will droop and die. And therefore it is that I lose no opportunity of urging upon young men the search after the best things in life. Love good books. Have a hobby; turn amateur photographer or electrician, anything you like, so that the blanks in your life are worthily filled. Remember that evil knocks in vain at the heart's door when the mind is "a mansion for all lovely forms"; but into the empty chamber the seven devils enter in all their diabolical completeness.

And yet, much as these "best things" may do for us if we use them well, they are not the master-forces of life. Let any one look back over his own past, and he will see that, for good or for ill, he owes most, not to some abstract truth, or idea, or principle, but to *somebody*—the master-forces of life are *personal*. "What will they think at home?" "How can I do this great wickedness and yet win her love?"—thoughts like these have steadied many a man on the brink of temptation when the wisest maxims of philosophy and morality would have availed him nothing.

But if this is so, do you not feel the more the strength, the cogency of Christ's appeal to us? What a mighty reinforcing of the master-forces of life awaits us here in this Gospel of a Living Christ! You young men may walk this world

girt with the purity and power of the Perfect Man. It is no doubtful message that I bring to you. He is, as multitudes can testify, "able to succour them that are tempted." Read this brief confession, picked at random from the great heap of Christian testimony—the more noteworthy, perhaps, because of its author's distance from the orthodox creeds: "I only speak my own experience: I am not talking theology or philosophy; I *know* what I am saying, and can point out the times and places when I should have fallen if I had been able to rely for guidance upon nothing better than a commandment or a deduction. But the pure, calm, heroic image of Jesus confronted me and I succeeded. I had no doubt as to what *He* would have done, and through Him I did not doubt what I ought to do."¹ And yet, though this strong helmet of salvation is offered to us all, how many of us—oh, the pity and wonder of it—choose to go through the pitiless hail of life's temptations bareheaded and undefended.

Does some one say, "There is no word in all this for me. It is useless to bid me flee from temptation: I fought and was beaten. Useless to tell me to resist the beginnings of evil; I am far past that; evil has conquered; I am its hopeless victim." My brother, what can I say to you? What but this, that Christ's Gospel is a Gospel for the beaten. All His life He looked out for and He gave His hand to the man that was down.

¹ Mark Rutherford.

The righteous who had never fallen, the whole that had no need of a physician, the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men, the son that had never at any time transgressed his father's commandment—it was not these that He sought; but the sinner, the bad man, the lost sheep, the prodigal son—these the Son of Man came that He might seek and save. And if you are of these, my brother, then you are the very man Christ wants. It was for you that He came from heaven to earth; it was for you that He died upon the cross; and it is to you that once again He sends through my poor lips His gracious message of hope: "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

HOW THE PRIZE WAS WON AT AN
OLD ATHLETIC FESTIVAL

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run, that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games is temperate in all things. Nowe they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected."—I COR. ix. 24-27.

VIII

HOW THE PRIZE WAS WON AT AN OLD ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.

TIME has washed out much of the vivid colouring which these words had for those who first read them. The language and metaphors are borrowed from those ancient athletic festivals which date back from before the dawn of history, and which were counted among the chief glories of the Grecian people. There was a special fitness in the choice of such an illustration in writing to the Christians at Corinth, for it was just outside their own city that one of the most famous of the festivals—the world-renowned Isthmian games—was celebrated every two years. And Paul himself could not fail to have been a witness on perhaps more than one occasion of the interest and excitement which these national gatherings awakened. Various contests were engaged in—wrestling, boxing, chariot and horse-racing; but the most famous, and that to which Paul makes most frequent allusion in his letters, was the foot-

race. The prize of the winner—the “corruptible crown” of which the Apostle speaks—was a wreath of pine-leaves chosen from the grove round the temple of the god.

It is not easy for us now to realise the position which these games held in the national life. “None but Greeks of pure blood who had done nothing to forfeit their citizenship were allowed to contend in them.” The month in which the festival was held was proclaimed a sacred month; while it lasted, all hostilities between rival states were suspended, on pain of the displeasure of the gods. Then on the day of the festival the white marble steps that ringed the race-course were crowded with eager spectators: the *élite* of cultured Greece, state-embassies with their gorgeous retinues, vast multitudes from every corner of the nation and even from distant colonies. Not less distinguished sometimes were the combatants on the course or in the arena; a prince of Macedon, a Pythagoras, or even a Plato might have been seen striving for the mastery. When the contest was ended honours of every kind were heaped upon the victor; friends reared his statue, poets sang his praise, while the city to which he belonged received him home like a victorious general, with triumphal processions and joyous festivities.¹

The influence on Paul’s thought of these great national gatherings is evident from all his writings.

¹ See Dr. Beet’s note on the “Greek Athletic Festivals” in his commentary on *Corinthians*.

His letters abound in references to them. Whenever he would set forth the Christian life as a *struggle*, it is almost always under the figure of the racer, the boxer, or the wrestler. He himself is a wrestler, though not with flesh and blood;¹ like an athlete in training he "keeps under" his body that he may be able to contend successfully;² as an eager runner, forgetting the things which are behind, he presses on towards the goal;³ for him too there is a crown laid up⁴—and so on through nearly a score of examples.

That these national games had their attendant evils, like some of our own games to-day, is more than likely. Nevertheless, even there, Paul's quick eye read lessons worth every Christian man's learning. It is some of these that I wish just now to repeat and emphasize.

In the Epistle from which my text is taken, Paul is writing to Christians, to men and women to whom had been made known the august realities of the Christian faith. They claimed as theirs a mighty hope, a surpassing ideal. They might be living amongst men who cared for nothing better than the poor perishing pine-wreaths of time, but *their* eyes were fixed upon "the crown of glory which fadeth not away." That was their faith; then says Paul, Live up to it. "Look at the racers: trained by long and painful discipline, their eyes fixed on the goal, every nerve strained

¹ Eph. vi. 12.

³ Phil. iii. 14.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

⁴ 2 Tim. iv. 8.

to its utmost—they do it for a corruptible crown, a twist of leaves that to-morrow's sun will wither ; but we, who seek the crown incorruptible, what are we doing? how are we living? *So run*—with the same singleness of purpose, the same panting eagerness—that ye may attain." There is the simple truth that I want to urge home.

1. But I must begin with a question, Is that true of us which Paul assumed to be true of these Corinthian Christians? Are our eyes set on the "incorruptible crown," or are we, like the man with the muckrake in Bunyan's immortal page, grubbing in the dust and dirt so that like him we can look no way but downwards? Or, to speak plainly and without metaphor, do we believe that goodness, the building up of a true Christlike character, and all of future blessedness that that carries along with it, are the supreme things for which, if need be, a man should sacrifice all else that he has? Is it with us not a mere make-believe, but one of the soul's root-convictions, that I may be rich and clever and famous, but that if I am not good—good after Christ's idea of goodness—it were better for me that I had never been born. Of course I do not mean that wealth and learning and fame are valueless,—no man in his senses dreams of saying that,—but that these things, good as they are, are only second best. Why here is Matthew Arnold, the apostle of "sweetness and light," himself admitting that conduct is three-fourths of life. What

does Christ tell us? He does not shut the kingdoms of knowledge and wealth against men. He does not turn the key in the door of the Exchange or the University and say to us His followers: "It is not lawful that *ye* should enter here"; but He does say, "Seek *ye first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Was Jesus right or was He wrong? The question is vital. Just as the racer must know where the goal lies, so we must settle the question, What am I going to live for? Is it for the things that will last, or for the things that will wither and die? The perishable pine-wreath or the unfading crown? Which?

2. Note, further, that if the true end of life is to be attained, it must be kept before us by a distinct effort of the mind. "I so run," said Paul, "*as not uncertainly*"; as if he had said, "Here am I, and there is the goal, and I take the straightest and therefore the shortest path to it." There were no needless curves and loops in his course. He knew for what he was living and he lived for it.

"Most men eddy about
Here and there—eat and drink,
Chatter and love and hate,
Gather and squander, are raised
Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving
Nothing; and then they die—
Perish—and no one asks
Who or what they have been,
More than he asks what waves,
In the moonlit solitudes mild

Of the midmost ocean, have swell'd,
Foam'd for a moment, and gone.

And there are some whom a thirst
Ardent, unquenchable, fires
Not with the crowd to be spent,
Not without aim to go round
In an eddy of purposeless dust,
Effort unmeaning and vain."

You, my brother, have you "chosen your path—

Path to a clear-purposed goal,
Path of advance"?

For without that "clear-purposed goal" life will end in failure. It is not enough for a man simply to resolve vaguely that he will try to do what is right. He must nail up the decision, never to be torn down: "I will make money if I can, I will win distinction at the University if I can, but whatever else I do or do not do, I will at least in all things obey Christ and do the will of God." Life is a sea wherein a thousand cross-currents run, and if you do not fix a strong hand on the helm, and a steady eye on the pole-star, your little craft will soon go to pieces on the rocks.

3. But again—to return to the metaphor of my text—it is not enough even to keep the goal in view. To reach it there must be effort intense and prolonged, up to the very edge of our powers of endurance. Go to the racer, thou sluggard, and learn of him; watch him that "receiveth the prize," and "*so* run, that ye may attain." Is not that

the gospel of common sense? If it is worth while to take pains to win a race, is it not to work out our own salvation? What unreasonable beings we are! In matters of worldly wisdom we are full of wise saws and modern instances; with our little hoard of maxims preaching down the follies of careless youth: "practice makes perfect"—"no royal road to knowledge"—"genius an infinite capacity for taking pains"—"no gains without pains," and so on and so on. All this we carefully remember in the ninety-and-nine things of life; but when it is the discipline and development of our moral and religious life that is concerned, we fling our maxims to the four winds, and we expect that somehow or other everything will come right of itself without our troubling. Watch a tight-rope dancer in a travelling show, and you know that behind that ten-minutes' performance there are months, may be years, of persistent, painful effort. Is then the discipline of the spirit a task so much lighter than the discipline of the body? What makes your Samuel Budgetts, your "successful merchants"? Tireless patience, unending toil; and do you think if getting "on" is difficult, getting "up" is easy? From Demosthenes downwards, men conscious of great powers of speech have been compelled to silence through some unhappy defect of utterance, but even this determination and toil have conquered in the end; and we think minutes will do for a bad temper what years will hardly do for a stutter!

Ask any master of his craft the secret of his success—a Stevenson, a Paderewski, a Ruskin¹—and they will give you but one answer; they have had to toil terribly, to scorn delights and live laborious days.

“The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.”

And this does not surprise us; we know that if excellence is our goal this is the only road to it. And yet in religion we act as if sleeping would accomplish quite as much, if not indeed a little more, than “toiling.” I tell you, nay. Like the racer that “receiveth the prize,” so must we run if we would attain. We must “exercise” ourselves “unto godliness,” be gymnasts (so we might translate it) with a view to godliness.² We must

¹ One of the first of R. L. Stevenson’s printed papers—*Ordered South*, a brief essay which first appeared in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, now to be found in *Virginibus Puerisque*—took him nearly three months to write: “I imagine nobody,” he says, “ever had such pains to learn a trade as I had; but I slogged at it day in and day out; and I frankly believe (thanks to my dire industry) I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world.”

It is said of Paderewski, the great pianist, that he practises twelve, sixteen, and even eighteen hours a day.

One of Ruskin’s pupils once said to him, “The instant I entered the gallery at Florence I knew what you meant by the supremacy of Botticelli.” “In an instant did you?” said Ruskin; “it took me twenty years to find it out.”

² 1 Tim. iv. 7, 8. The word translated “exercise” (γυμνασία) in verse 8 is identical with our English word “gymnastics.” Further, the verb in ver. 7 (γυμναζε) is formed from the same root, but it has

“strive”—agonise—if we would enter in at the strait gate. It is the law of the Lord of the contest, and no man is crowned “except he have contended lawfully.”

4. Notice, in the last place, that “every man that striveth in the games is *temperate in all things*.” For ten months before the time of the festival the athlete underwent the severest training, submitting himself to all manner of restrictions in food and drink, etc., that so he might be able to contend successfully. And in this again he was an example for Paul: “I so run.” Then suddenly, as his fashion was, he changes the metaphor; he is no longer a racer but a boxer: “so fight—so box I.” His antagonist is his body. He does not beat the air; he aims well, and plants his blows where they will tell: “I buffet my body—I beat it black and blue.”¹ But whichever illustration we prefer to take, the meaning is the same—without self-denial we can never “attain.”

Let no one mistake: this is no defence of asceticism as an end in itself, and for its own sake. It is only the affirmation of the great and true principle, that the lower must give way to the higher, wherever the two clash. “If thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble”—mark, *if* they do, it is not necessary that they should, but

no corresponding equivalent in English, and we can only give full expression to its meaning by some such paraphrase as I have suggested.

¹ See page 10.

if they do, then there is only one thing to be done—"cut it off and cast it from thee." That was the principle of the runner in the games; he gave up not only what was positively harmful, but also what at other times he could enjoy and be none the worse for, just because he had the prize in view. And if we are to run the race set before us we must lay aside not only the sin which, like a closely clinging garment, wraps us round, but also "every weight"—the things that though they be not sins are yet hindrances. "If we would run well, we must run light."

Is there not an answer here to many of those questions with which young men and women especially are for ever assailing their ministers—questions about dancing, card-playing, theatre-going, and the like? For myself, I always refuse to answer such questions except in the most general terms. The law that applies here is not "Bear ye one another's burdens," but "Each man shall bear his own burden"; and no one is justified in seeking relief from the responsibility of a decision which rests with himself alone. Nevertheless, it may be well to point out that it is not enough simply to satisfy ourselves that any particular course of action, about which we may be in doubt, is not absolutely sinful. What is not—to make the distinction already referred to—a "sin" may yet be "weight," a "weight," *i.e.*, for me, though not necessarily therefore for all; and if that be so, my duty is clear, I must cast it from me. These

things of which I have spoken, they are not the highest things in life—we are not here to amuse ourselves; and if, harmless as they may be in themselves, they are yet hindering us from attaining the higher and better things which God designs for us, surely we ought to let them go.

Is that for some a hard saying? Yet is it not the dictate of prudence, of reason? I sat at table once with a young man who drank vinegar with his water, and took no sugar in his tea; he was “in training” for some sports that were to come off shortly. But the man who is willing for the sake of a belt or a silver cup, and a paragraph in an evening paper, to submit to little inconveniences of this sort, and then refuses to deny himself in anything in order that he may make his own the things in life that are really worth having, is a short-sighted fool. “It is *better*”—calculate it, if you will, as a problem in Profit and Loss—“it is *better* to enter into life maimed or halt rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire.” Surely, surely it is better to seek after that which God has made us for, even though it be through painful loss and self-martyrdom, than, missing that, to spend our days in idle pleasures and inglorious ease.

Does anybody tell me I have forgotten the central truth of the Gospel? that I have been speaking all this time of what man has to do for himself, and have said nothing of what God has done for him?

One thing at a time. Many an idle, good-for-nothing Christian has made for himself a comfortable bed of down out of the doctrine of Justification by Faith, when he ought to have been in the gymnasium. There is no salvation by struggle, and there is none without it. Effort alone is vain, faith alone is equally vain. If I had only a Gospel of self-help to preach, I should be a fool for my pains ; none the less is it needed. I go further than that, and I tell you as plainly as I know how, that if a man is content to let blind impulse carry him where it will, if he has thrown the reins upon the horse's neck, and will not so much as move a finger to get them into his hands again, then he will go to the devil, and all his Bible-reading, and prayer-saying, and church-going will be powerless to save him. Then, my brothers, gird up the loins of your mind ; be sober. Take to yourselves the whole armour of God. Summon every ally into this holy war. Remember, Mansoul never fell save by the treachery of the townsmen within her walls. Heaven's King is on our side. Above the clash of battle He cries to us : " Fight, I'll help thee ; conquer, I'll crown thee." Now, now, will you enlist in His service ; will you fight under His banner ?

THE PROBLEM OF PROBLEMS—
MYSELF

IX

THE PROBLEM OF PROBLEMS— MYSELF

I HAVE omitted the usual Scripture passage from the head of this address, because before giving you anything by way of text, I want you to read over with me one or two brief extracts from three modern and well-known volumes. I take this from Mrs. Lynn Linton's popular novel, *The True History of Joshua Davidson*. Speaking of the hero of her story she says: "No man was ever more convinced than he that sin and misery are the removable results of social circumstances, and that poverty, ignorance, and class distinctions consequent, are at the root of all the crimes and wretchedness afloat." There is, by the way, a curious mingling of metaphor in the last part of the sentence; but let that pass. My second extract is from Mr. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. This is the nineteenth century looked at from the vantage-ground of the year 2000: "In your day"—*i.e.* the day in which we are living

—"fully nineteen-twentieths of the crime, using the word broadly to include all sorts of misdemeanours, resulted from the inequality in the possessions of the individuals." My last quotation is from Mrs. Annie Besant's recently-published *Autobiography*. "Whence comes sin?" she asks; and this is her answer: "Evil comes from ignorance, ignorance of physical and moral facts, primarily from ignorance of physical order. . . . The root of all is poverty and ignorance. Educate the children, and give them fair wage for fair work in their maturity, and crime will gradually diminish and ultimately disappear. Make the circumstances good and the results will be good."¹

And now, with these extracts in our mind, let us turn to the New Testament. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" said Jesus, "for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also."² "Out of the heart"—the "heart," mark, not "social circumstances"—"come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts . . ." *all* the things, indeed, "which defile the man."³

¹ This is Mrs. Besant's exposition of her faith at one period of her chameleon-like mental history. Whether she holds to exactly the same view still I cannot tell; but with this word of explanation, I trust I do her no injustice in allowing her words to stand as I have quoted them above.

² Matt. xxiii. 25, 26.

³ *Ib.* xv. 19, 20.

"The kingdom of God is within you";¹ or, as Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."² All is summed up in the great word of Christ: "Ye must be born again."³

So then in this double set of sayings—one from the New Testament, the other from the writers whose books I have quoted—the same problem of evil is looked at from two different points of view. On the one hand it is urged, "If man is bad, it is because his circumstances are bad, and if you want to put him right, you must begin by putting them right." On the other hand it is replied, "No; that is only part of the truth, and the least important part too. If man is bad, the seat of the mischief is in himself; and therefore the starting point of all true reformation must be the individual. Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good also."

Here, then, a pretty clear issue is raised. My aim just now is to demonstrate and to vindicate the position of Christianity. We are face to face with all kinds of questions, the land-question, the labour-question, the liquor-question, and I know not how many more besides, but *the* question, the problem of problems is just this—*Myself*.

Yet do not let me be misunderstood. This does not mean that Christianity deals *only* with the individual, and that in regard to these other questions that I have named the Church can look

¹ Luke xvii. 21.

² Rom. xiv. 17.

³ John iii. 3.

on with the eye of an indifferent spectator, as if she had no word to utter in regard to them. There was a time, undoubtedly, when men's conceptions of religion were too narrow, because too exclusively individualistic. They saw, indeed—and it was their supreme glory that they saw it so clearly and preached it so faithfully—that Christ Jesus is able to save all that put their trust in Him. They felt the surpassing greatness of His Gospel of redemption for the individual as perhaps few of us to-day have ever felt it. But they did not see that over and above—or rather, shall I say, through—the salvation of the individual, Christ seeks the establishment of a Divine kingdom, the bringing in of new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Be that as it may, so far as the past is concerned, no one can deny that that larger conception of the meaning and purpose of Christ's work among men is to-day the common possession of all sections of the Christian Church. From the Pope at Rome to the General of the Salvation Army, we are all of us, for better or for worse, busy with "the social question." For once the novelist and the revivalist join hands. Rudyard Kipling has a terrible, short story dealing with East London life; and this is how the "heroine" of the story addresses a Christian worker: "I know what's what, *I* do, and they don't want your religion, Mum. It's all right when they comes to die, Mum, but till they die what they wants is things

to eat." And if you turn to General Booth's much-talked-of book, you find him putting this question: "What is the use of preaching the Gospel to men whose whole attention is concentrated upon a mad, desperate struggle to keep themselves alive?" Are not our social questions religious questions too? With regard to the drink-question it is needless to speak; the Church has made that its own long ago. But can it stop there? Will not the stern logic of facts compel it to go farther? Is it not becoming clearer every day that if we are to deal effectually with this one evil we cannot deal with it alone? Our social problems are a matted, tangled mass, and the moment you pull at one loose end half a dozen others come up with it. What then? Is every Christian minister to turn politician, to draw up little programmes of social reform, and to agitate until they are carried out? By no means. Ministers are not called to be statesmen. But they are called to be prophets; and woe to the prophet that is dumb in the presence of evil! The cry of the wronged son of the soil,¹ of the over-tasked toiler,² of the labourer defrauded of his hire,³

¹ Isaiah v. 8, 9. Two-thirds of the land of Scotland to-day is in the hands of 330 men. There is (or there was till quite recently) one Scotch landlord who can ride thirty miles in a straight line over his own property. Millions of acres in the Highlands have been depopulated simply that my Lord Somebody-or-other may have a forest in which to hunt his deer, or a moor over which to shoot his grouse. (See Scott Matheson's *Church and Social Problems*).

² Isaiah lviii. 3 (R.V. marg.)

³ Jas. v. 4.

must all enter into his ears. He must cry aloud and spare not; he must be the nation's conscience, as the very voice of God to plead for the oppressed and to condemn the oppressor.¹ The stone is still at the mouth of the tomb where Lazarus lies stiff and cold, and till strong Christian hands have rolled it away, the dead man cannot hear the life-giving word of the Son of God.

Yes, but when the stone is rolled away, *Lazarus is still to bring forth*. And that is what we all seem to be forgetting. Let us have temperance legislation, and shorter hours, and a "living wage," and better dwellings for the poor—the sooner the better; but when you have got them you will not have turned the devil out nor brought the millennium in. When you have made the world fit to live in, you have still to make man fit to live in it. Exception is sometimes taken nowadays to the old phrase "saving souls." What is meant may be reasonable enough; nevertheless the objection is quite needless. For what, after all, are all our social problems at bottom but *soul* problems? I wish it were possible for every young man to read and consider well a recent

¹ Speaking of the land-question and the liquor-question of Isaiah's day, Prof. G. A. Smith says: "They are something worse than questions. They are huge sins, and require not merely the statesman's wit, but all the penitence and zeal of which a nation's conscience is capable. It is in this that the force of Isaiah's treatment lies. We feel he is not facing questions of state, but sins of men."

utterance on this subject by Dr. Oswald Dykes.¹ Dr. Dykes speaks as one in full sympathy with the new social spirit: "The movement for elevating and gladdening the lives of the poor is," he says, "an outgrowth of the Christian spirit." "The theology and the pulpit of our Churches," he declares, "dare not hold themselves aloof from such applications of Christianity to common life." "But," he adds, "the new social theory of salvation is apt to be as one-sided as the old, and a great deal more shallow." And therefore, "the Church must protest that the problem of personal guilt and sin is the first and the worst and the nearest of all problems for each man of us to solve, that which it most concerns us to get settled, and that with this problem no one deals and no one can deal save the Divine Saviour who was crucified on Calvary." I say "Amen" to every word of that with all my heart. Keep, if I may so say, one foot of the compass firmly fixed here, in every man's need of Christ's redemption, and with the other limb you may sweep as wide a circle as you please—the wider the better. But when so many voices are urging the importance of the big sweep—and mine is often among the number—suffer me to be old-fashioned and to preach the old Gospel of individual salvation as the only hope for the salvation of the world.

¹ A sermon preached at the reopening of Regent Square Presbyterian Church, London, and reported *verbatim* in *The Christian World Pulpit* (13th September 1893)—perhaps the

Turn back to the extracts with which this address opened. In brief, they come to this, that (as I once heard a Socialist say) men in the mass are what their circumstances make them. Now I venture to affirm that that is true neither scientifically nor historically.

1. It is not scientifically true. Take any plant or animal, and ask a scientist what are the determining factors in its life-history. He will tell you they are two. There is first what he calls "the nature of the organism," and, secondly, "the nature of the conditions." And he will further probably tell you that the former is the more powerful factor of the two. Now the same may be said of the moral life of man; but with this important difference: that man possesses a power which the plant or the animal does not possess of making his environment at the same time that it is making him;¹ so that in his case "the nature of the conditions" counts for less even than it does in the case of the plant or animal. Judge, then, of the truth of statements such as those I have quoted above. For what do they amount to but this—that environment is everything, and the nature of the organism nothing; that all depends on the conditions under which the original life-force is developed, and nothing upon the character of

wisest and most timely contribution of the year to the discussion of this difficult subject.

¹ See Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*.

that force itself? Could there be a more patent absurdity?

2. Not less decisive is the appeal to history. It is easy enough for Mrs. Besant to tell us what education and a fair wage will bring to pass by and by; but what is the verdict of the past? Take, *e.g.*, the history of the great Roman civilisation. How great that civilisation was I do not need to tell you. Something of the pomp and circumstance, the sheen and glitter of it, you may see in Lord Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii*. It gave to us a system of laws of which, perhaps, it is not affirming too much to say that it has left its imprint upon the statute-book of almost every civilised community since. It gave to us a literature without a knowledge of which no man's education even at the present day is considered complete. It fostered a love of beauty which not only built for itself magnificent structures that, even in their ruins, remain to this day at once the delight and the despair of the architect, but which spent itself in the adornment of even the commonest and meanest utensils of daily life. All this, and much more than this, the great Roman civilisation wrought; and what was the outcome of it? What, I mean, was its outcome among the very classes by whom and for whom these things were secured? Well, read the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and see to what depths of foulest infamy Roman society had fallen. "But," you ask, "was Paul

an impartial judge?" Then hear Paul's critic, Matthew Arnold—

"On that hard Pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell."

One whose scholarship¹ has given him a right to be heard on a question of this kind tells us that "the world has never been so ingeniously and so exhaustively wicked as in Rome during the first century." And yet surely if ever "good circumstances" had a chance to show the regenerative powers that are in them, it was there, and at that time.

The falsity of this half-truth that man is made by his "circumstances" is demonstrated by a hundred facts daily. A man may be a friend and companion of Jesus Christ and turn out a Judas Iscariot; he may go straight from that fair, pure Presence to a traitor's and a suicide's grave. Two workmen lived in a street where a friend of mine had his church. One of them was a skilled artisan and earned forty-five shillings a week; the other was an unskilled labourer and earned seventeen shillings a week. But the unskilled labourer "got converted," and on seventeen shillings a week he made his home like a bit of heaven, while the "home" of the trained artisan with his forty-five shillings was a den of squalor and of misery. Do all the saints live in the West End,

¹ Dr. Marcus Dods, *Erasmus and other Essays*, p. 278.

and all the sinners in the East End? Does the devil of uncleanness never take up his abode in a West-end mansion as well as in a Grassmarket slum? You want "to move the masses to a cleaner sty" do you? God help you to do it; but what is the use if you don't first cleanse the human animal? "Behind the social problem," says Henry George, "lies the problem of the individual." "The soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul." That is the great affirmation of Christianity. Here in the individual it finds the pivot, the centre, the hinge of all true reformation. The man, not society, must be your unit. Make social salvation, in its widest and largest sense, your goal; individual salvation must be your starting-point.

Does that make the road too long for the eager reformer anxious to put a wrong world right? And yet, what other course is possible? We are in the habit nowadays of condemning society and condoning the individual. But is not society in the main just what individuals make it? "The character of the aggregate," says Herbert Spencer, "is determined by the characters of the units." And he illustrates it thus. Suppose a man building with good, square, well-burnt bricks; without the use of mortar he may build a wall of a certain height and stability. But if his bricks are warped and cracked or broken, the wall cannot be of the same height and stability. If, again, instead of bricks he use cannon-balls,

then he cannot build a wall at all; at most, something in the form of a pyramid with a square or rectangular base. And if, once more, for cannon-balls we substitute rough unhewn boulders, no definite, stable form is possible.¹ Exactly; "the character of the aggregate is determined by the characters of the units." Stated thus, the truth is so obvious as to be almost a truism; and yet in its most important application we lose sight of it, and we expect that by some happy chance or other we are going to build a reconstructed society when we have not reconstructed men and women to build with. And therefore, I repeat, *the* problem, the problem of problems, is still this—*Myself*.

And this is why Socialism can never be a substitute for Christianity: a *substitute*, I say; whether or not it may in some form or other prove an *ally* of Christianity I do not now discuss; but substitute it can never be. Socialism busies itself with the ordering of our social and economic life, and it seeks the welfare of the community through a reconstruction of that life: it lives and moves and has its being among the things that are visible and material. But the "note" of Christ's teaching, as Matthew Arnold saw and said so often, is its *inwardness*; Christianity is a spiritual religion, or it is nothing. How, then, unless man become utterly vulgarised and materialised, can the rise of Socialism mean the

¹ *The Study of Sociology*, p. 48.

fall of Christianity? Because a man learns to listen to John Burns, will he need the less to give heed to Jesus Christ? Change as you please the conditions under which wealth is produced and distributed—and this is the aim of Socialism—yet man, the producer, the distributor, remains the same, and it is with him that Christianity deals.

There are, I know, Socialists who recognise this as clearly as I do; but there are, on the other hand, many—and some of them have the ear of great multitudes of their fellow-countrymen—who speak as if Christianity had had its day, and would very soon cease to be. And they are forgetting, every one of them, that a new environment does not mean a new man. Yet it is the man and not the environment that is to-day, as it always has been, the real problem. Readers of Mr. Bellamy's book, to which I have already referred, will remember the eloquent sermon in which a divine of the year 2000 contrasts that golden time with the leaden days of the nineteenth century. He points the contrast by a parable. Humanity is compared to a rosebush which, in these our days, was "planted in a swamp, watered with black bog-water, breathing miasmatic fogs by day, and chilled with poison dews at night." Gardeners did their best, but in vain; the plant would not thrive, the flowers would not bloom. But at last the year of wisdom came, and instead of pottering longer with the plant, some one said,

"Let us try a change of soil." And so the rose-bush was transplanted, "and set in sweet, warm, dry earth, where the sun bathed it, the stars wooed it, and the south wind caressed it"; and lo! it put forth its blossoms, whose fragrance filled the whole world.

But is it really all so simple as this? How to deal with the soil is a grave and difficult problem, doubtless; but it is not beyond us; we are grappling with it more and more successfully every day. The real problem is the rosebush itself. "Give me the bush," says Mr. Bellamy, in effect, "and I will show you how to grow the roses." No doubt; but how first to grow your bush—that is the difficulty. For humanity, as most of us know it, is all too often but a rude hedgerow thorn, which all the bathing of suns, and wooing of stars, and caressing of south winds can never make into aught besides. The bush, not the soil; the man, not the environment—there is the problem.

How is it to be solved?

There is a great word in our theological vocabulary—at least there was, and I hope we are not going to lose it—the word *regeneration*. If you were a student at one of our colleges, wise professors would discuss its meaning to you. They might prove to you with many a long argument that it comes before or after justification. And I sometimes fear lest this wondrous truth of God become to us nothing more than a curious

dogmatic fossil whose exact place in the theological strata learned men may painfully dispute. Fools and blind that we are, if it be so. For is there not here, if we did but know it, the most vital, the most blessed, the most saving of all truths—that which of all others we most need to hear? “Ye must be born again.” Christ offers to us a new life ; not a doctrine, not an example, but a life ; a life, not from man, but from God, a life which is God’s greatest and best gift to the children of men. And this is the life which through the Gospel is brought nigh unto us. God help us to receive it, God help us to preach it.

ENTHUSIASM

“Simon the Zealot.” —ACTS i. 13.

X

ENTHUSIASM

“**S**IMON the Zealot,” not as the more familiar version renders it, “Simon Zelotes.” This is the title which distinguishes this disciple both in Luke’s Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark he is called, according to our Authorised Version, “Simon the Canaanite.” But here again the Revised Version supplies a needed correction. The true reading is not “Canaanite,” but “Cananaean”; and “Cananaean” is not a geographical but a political term, being, in fact, only the Aramaic form of the word “Zealot”; so that really “Simon the Zealot” is the title by which this disciple is known in each of the four lists of the Twelve Apostles in which his name appears.

The Zealots were a knot of political irreconcilables, fiercely opposed to the dominion of Rome. Their name may have been suggested by the words of the dying Mattathias, the father of Judas Maccabaeus: “Now, therefore, my sons,

be ye *zealous* for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers." In their attitude to the established government of the day, they may be compared to the Carbonari of Italy in Mazzini's time. It was to this band of political enthusiasts that Simon once belonged; he left them to join the disciples of Jesus. Beyond this we know nothing. No incident of the Gospel narratives is associated with this disciple's name. Luke tells us that he waited with the others in the upper room at Jerusalem; after that we hear no more. This seems little enough to build a sermon on; and yet the fact that Simon had been what he had—as I have said, a kind of political enthusiast,—added to the fact that Jesus called him to be one of the Twelve, may serve, I think, to remind us—and young men especially—of two or three important truths. I want to speak to you of *Enthusiasm and its relation to Jesus Christ*.

I. *Never be ashamed of your enthusiasms.*—Every man should be a bit of an enthusiast. The same degree of enthusiasm is not possible to all, but a "dash" of it there should be in every one's nature. I like a schoolboy who can shout at a cricket-match and tremble with excitement in every limb at the chance of his side winning the victory. Give me the young man whose face lights up, and whose eyes brighten, as he talks to you about his favourite hobby—his books, his

music, his pictures, his scientific experiments; and even when we are old, it ought not to be impossible for the hot flame to leap up from the gray ashes of our life. For all of us there should be a something by which we can be rapt clean out of ourselves, a something that can awaken all "the slumbering best" within us. We too should have our visions and revelations, visions of social, political, and religious reform; should be caught up into the third heaven and hear unspeakable words, till, like Paul, whether in the body or out of the body, we cannot tell.

All this is, I know, clean contrary to some persons' notions of what is right and proper. Their ideal is to be "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null." For them the two great commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets are these: "Be sober," "Let everything be done decently and in order." Their favourite motto is, "Look before you leap." They worship the great goddess of Prudence, and as for "enthusiasts," "visionaries," "fanatics," "day-dreamers" — their soul hateth them.

Such a temper ends at last in cynicism, to which all things, even the best, are vanity. A clever living novelist has shown us in one of her characters the workings of the cynical spirit: "The uselessness of utterance, the futility of enthusiasm, the inaccessibility of the ideal, the practical absurdity of trying to realise any of the mind's inward dreams; these were the kind of

considerations which descended upon him slowly and fatally, crushing down the newly-springing growths of action or of passion.”¹ That is the deadliest blight that can fall upon the human spirit, smiting all its green places with barrenness. “The young man of to-day,” some one has declared, “has no religion and no enthusiasm.” I do not believe it ; but if any such there be among us, let him kneel and pray God to deliver him from that death of the soul.

And even though no such fatal results are to be dreaded, let us never lend a hand to damp down the fires of any man’s enthusiasm. The world cannot spare it. We owe far more to one of these hot-headed, blundering men,—men like Peter, for example,—who sometimes err along the line of their real greatness, than to a whole regiment of respectable nobodies, who never violated a single law of propriety. Enthusiasts are not faultless ; but, after all, faultlessness is a negative virtue, obtainable cheaply enough. Plenty of people never go wrong, for the very good and sufficient reason that they never “go” at all. I think it was Goethe who said that there are some of whose future wisdom we should have greater hopes if they could only once commit some extravagance. “For God’s sake,” cries Robert Louis Stevenson, “give me the young man who has brains enough to make a fool of himself!”

If only the Church of Christ had always known

¹ Langham in Mrs. Humphry Ward’s *Robert Elsmere*.

how rightly to use her enthusiasts—how to direct their wise extravagances, their magnificent indiscretions! Alas! we are not always wise even yet. God sends us a man made after no conventional pattern, who cannot, if he would, jog along in the well-worn ruts; and what happens? Why, half a score of well-meaning wiseacres pounce upon him, and try to clap him into an ecclesiastical strait-waistcoat, and shear away all that they call his “eccentricities.” And if they could succeed, what would you get as a result? An irreproachable nonentity who would never make any mistakes—nor anything else either.

“One must become
Fanatic—be a wedge—a thunderbolt
To smite a passage through this close-grained world.”

“Yes, but,” says some timid soul, “think of the mischief these madmen work; the unrest, the unsettlement they cause us. Look at the Socialists, for instance, our modern Zealots, these ‘cock-sparrow revolutionaries,’ who expect the millennium (to borrow Russell Lowell’s phrase¹) ‘by express train to-morrer,’ who think that El Dorado lies just over the next hill-top—why will they not let us rest?” Be it so: granted that the enthusiast is often an extremist; yet what are these occasional excesses but the small penalty that we must pay because enthusiasts like the rest of us are but human? After all, is it not better, as the homely

¹ In the *Biglow Papers*.

proverb says, that the pot should boil over than that it should not boil at all? If extravagance is bad, is not apathy infinitely worse? In a world like ours—"here, where men sit and hear each other groan," "where but to think is to be full of sorrow"—I had rather the wildest, maddest dream of the Socialist, who is at least anxious to do something, than the easy-going indifference of the sleek and well-to-do, who only desire to be let alone and to make money.

Young men, never be ashamed of your enthusiasms. The zeal of better men than any of us has often won harsh words as its first reward. When the disciples stood up to preach Christ on the day of Pentecost, the multitude said they were drunk. When Paul with noble earnestness pleaded his cause before Festus, Festus cried with a loud voice: "Paul, thou art mad: thy much learning doth turn thee to madness." When Christ taught the people, many of them said, "He hath a devil, and is mad: why hear ye Him?" Even His friends feared once; "and they went out to lay hold on Him; for they said, He is beside Himself." It is good to be zealously affected in a good cause. "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." But those whom God will spue out of His mouth are they who, like the Laodiceans of old, are neither hot nor cold.

2. *Keep the strength of your enthusiasm for the*

best things.—Do not let me be misunderstood. What is best at one time is not always best at all times. If you offer me a Shakespeare or a box of tin soldiers, I shall have no difficulty in making my choice. Make the same offer to a child of three, and he will have no difficulty either, only he will take the soldiers; and I for one will certainly not blame him. "The true wisdom is to be always seasonable."¹ "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things." But that is just what I want to make sure of—*have* we put away childish things? Is there not many a grown-up man who still sees things in childhood's perspective? who still prefers the toys and lets the Shakespeare lie on the shelf unopened? It is good for manhood to maintain something of its old delight in boyhood's games and pursuits; it is not good when these become as a kind of Aaron's rod that swallows up all the larger and worthier interests of our life. He only has rightly learned to live who has learned how to distribute himself, where to place the emphasis, when to give and when to withhold.

Are we making the most of what is most worthy? What should we think of a man who built a steam-engine factory and then manufactured nothing but pins? What should we say of a student who toiled till he was Senior Wrangler,

¹ R. L. Stevenson.

only to teach the alphabet and simple addition in some village school for the rest of his days? Yet is there not the same sort of *disproportion* in the lives of many of us? Some of you have been marksmen in a shooting competition; there were so many rounds to be fired at the 200 yards range, so many at the 500, and so on. Now you have a more serious business in hand. Remember, your ammunition is limited; you may use it as you will; do not play the fool and waste all your bullets on the short range!

Let your zeal be *according to knowledge*; i.e. not, as some seem to read it, let your knowledge dilute and weaken your enthusiasm; but rather, let it direct and control it; let it fix and fasten it upon the things that are most worthy of it, "Seek ye *first*"—what? what but *the first things*?—"the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

3. *Consecrate your enthusiasm to the service of Jesus Christ.*—Many of you are members of Christian Churches; take your enthusiasm with you into your Church life. There are some amongst us to-day who seem to think that religion and enthusiasm have nothing to do with each other. Certainly no one would ever charge them with being beside themselves. There is nothing they hate so much as a noise. Why in the world a man should want to shout because he has "got converted" is wholly beyond their comprehension. And as for those horrid people the

Salvation Army, with their jerseys and their drums, their "Hallelujahs" and their "Amens"—Bah! I have seen a man who ventured to respond audibly to the minister's prayer looked upon by his fellow-worshippers with something of the astonishment with which Trinculo gazed upon Caliban.¹

But let us be reasonable. Boisterousness is not the same thing as earnestness. Some there are, too, who "shout" about nothing; the blood creeps languidly through their veins; nothing sends it from the heart five beats the faster. And since religion can but deal with men as it finds them, such will take their religion, as they take everything else, quietly and without demonstration. And some there are who, in all honesty let it be spoken, have nothing to shout about! All I plead for just now is reasonable consistency. If when you go to a great political gathering to listen to Lord Rosebery or Mr. Balfour, you think it no shame to stand on your seat and wave your hat and sing with the loudest, "He's a jolly good fellow," why should you wonder if sometimes another is swept away by the strong tides of religious emotion, over-mastered by his sense of the presence and power of God?

The service of Christ calls for, as it is worthy of, our loftiest enthusiasm. Few things are to be more lamented to-day than that so little—a mere

¹ This occurred, perhaps I should say, in a Scotch church, where responses are very rarely heard.

trickle — of the daring, the enterprise of the modern commercial world has found its way into the Christian Church. In all our Churches there are shrewd and nimble-witted men of business, who in the business world are always on the alert, and never miss a chance; yet when they come to deal with the affairs of Christ's kingdom their fingers are all thumbs; they are clogged with prudence at every step; they *dare* nothing for the glory of God and the salvation of men. "What troubles me," said a wise and witty Scotch divine the other day, "is not so much the non-church-going, as the non-going Church." * Mr. Chairman," cried an enthusiastic colleague of mine once in a church-meeting, "I move we move the world." Magnificent! The early Christians not only moved the world; they turned it upside down, as even their very enemies confessed. Oh, for a baptism of the spirit of the heroic Carey, to expect great things from God, to attempt great things for Him! And it is to the young men of our Churches, that we look for the rekindling of the fires of Christian enthusiasm.

And you who have not yet yielded yourselves to Christ, remember He can find room in His service for every gift you possess. Paul the Christian is not less zealous than Saul the Pharisee. He is converted, yet is his natural force not abated; only its direction is changed. The pent-up energy of his great soul which before had gone thundering along the wrong

track, his conversion switched on to the right line, and the power that once wrought for man's destruction works now with undiminished might for his salvation. Simon is not less "the Zealot" because he is now also the disciple. Young men, with your restless energies and eager, ardent spirits, Christ calls for you, He has need of you. Will ye also be His disciples?

THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT
FOR CHRISTIANITY

*"And a certain man that was lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that passed into the temple."—*ACTS iii. 2.

*"And seeing the man which was lame, & standing, said to him, they could say nothing against it."—*ACTS iv. 14.

XI

THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT FOR CHRISTIANITY

THE lame man and what to do with him—that is the great problem of the ages. All the intellectual conundrums which the subtle mind of man has propounded look very small by the side of that.

There is something very significant in the place which this incident occupies in the sacred narrative. A new religion had just come into existence ; it was about to match itself against the great world-forces of evil, and here at the very outset it is called upon to deal with the lame man.

And the lame man is with us still—in the drunkard, the gambler, the thriftless, the pauper, in the vast army of the morally incapable, and, as we are sometimes tempted to think them, the morally incurable—the men and women who are the pain, the perplexity, and the despair of the Christian, the social reformer, of every man with a

head to think and a heart to feel. Nor is that all. The wretchedness and misery which such as these suffer in themselves is a mere fraction of that which they cause, and which they represent. Here, in this story, we read of some who daily carried the lame man to the temple door; their lives were darkened by the shadow that lay upon his, their burdens the greater because of the heavy lot which he had to bear. And to-day we speak of the drunkard, the gambler, the pauper; yet who among us really knows half that lies behind those words? Statistics may tell you of sixty thousand who every year lie down in a drunkard's grave, but even more terrible still is the long, black shadow which these sixty thousand cast, within which the lives of little children and loving women droop and fade and die.

Yes, the lame man is with us still, and, if it does not sound too fanciful, he is still at "the gate which is called Beautiful." We boast a civilisation the like of which the world has never seen before; but yet, while we build the mansion, we build the workhouse too. Here is the university and there the gaol. Within the same city is the east end and the west end; and oh, "how far the east is from the west!" We glory in our cathedrals and churches great and fair; but there, within sound of the music and within sight of the worshippers, still lies the lame man. The glittering temple of our modern civilisation thrusts upward its heaven-piercing pinnacles; but still at

its gate crouches the lame man in his helplessness and misery.

What are you going to do with him? In this story I read of the lame man and the healed man. How to bridge the chasm, how to make of the one the other, how to work this moral miracle—that is the great problem. And, believe me, this is the great test by which all our systems, be they political, social, or religious, must ultimately be judged: what can they do for the lame man?

It is with the application of this test to the religion of Jesus Christ that we are principally concerned just now; but it may not be amiss to point out in passing that we are at last beginning to insist upon the application of the same test in political life. The old pagan conception of the State as a kind of deified policeman, whose one duty was to maintain order and to cudgel unruly subjects, is now happily passing away, and we are coming to recognise that the State has duties higher than the mere preservation of the peace; it must defend the defenceless, relieve the oppressed, and care for the uncared,—in one word, it must look after the lame man.

But that is a parenthesis. My point just now is this: this test Christianity frankly and fully accepts. "The God that answereth by *healed* — *men*, let Him be God." "Accepts the test," did I say? Nay, Christianity demands it, insists upon it; it will be judged by no other. Itself throws down the challenge: "If I do not the works of

My Father, believe Me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not Me, believe the works." Here then is the final and, as I believe, the unanswerable argument for Christianity: the testimony of the healed man. And, mark you, not the healed man of yesterday only, but the healed man of to-day. For this is the glory of the Christian religion, that with every new day it raises up new witnesses; it creates fresh evidence as it goes along. There are some clever but short-sighted people who imagine that if only they could silence the testimony of the four Evangelists we should soon hear the last of Christianity. Mrs. Humphry Ward, *e.g.*, puts Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John into the witness-box, overturns their evidence (at least to her own satisfaction), and forthwith turns round to us and says, "There is an end of the matter: the case has gone against Christianity." But has Jesus Christ only four witnesses? *They* are by no means demolished yet. But, waiving that question, so far from the case being concluded when their testimony has been given, it has only just been opened. We claim to put into the box the saints of sixty generations—St. Paul and St. Augustine and Luther and Wesley, the spokesmen of a great multitude whom no man can number, who have been delivered from sin, and who know that they have been so delivered by the power of the risen Christ.

What is included in this testimony of the

healed man it is impossible now to state even in outline. But take two sets of facts :

1. Glance down the record of history, and, true though it be that the Church has not always had a clean sheet, that so-called "Christianity" has often been a strange commentary on the teaching of Christ, this, at least, we may affirm with confidence—that the best friends of the lame man have always been among the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Take the first century of the Christian era. The salt that saved the old Roman world from utter corruption was the teaching and influence of Jesus Christ ; in all history there is no fact more demonstrable than that. Or take the question of slavery. That Christian men were miserably slow to understand the application of the principles they professed to believe nobody need deny ; but the fact remains that it was Christ's teaching which first "marked" the tree for destruction, it was Christ's followers who finally destroyed it. If women and children are no longer, at least in civilised lands, the mere chattels or playthings of brutal, selfish men, to whom do they owe their emancipation ? Is it not again to Him who first taught the worth, and therefore the rights, the sacred indefeasible rights, of every individual soul ? And you, working men, are not you too in debt to this Jesus of Nazareth ? You are proud of your hard-won rights, your civil liberty, your freedom of speech. But set foot on a foreign shore, where men do not serve and

honour Christ, and what are your "rights" worth to you then? How comes it to pass that those two things—the rule of Christ and the rights of the common people—always seem to go together? Our modern philanthropy too—how shall we explain it? Jesus Christ built Edinburgh Infirmary. In all Britain is there a single great institution of charity and mercy that could keep its doors open twelve months, if you withdrew from it the gifts of those whose love for the suffering poor was first awakened by the love of Christ for all? Mrs. Besant herself once confessed to Mr. Stead her disappointment that agnostics did so little in the service of man, and added that the few who did come forward to help were only those who, like herself, had been brought up Christians. Now these are facts that must be reckoned with; this is a testimony that cannot be lightly set aside.

2. And here is a second group of facts, very different, but not less important. There are tens of thousands of men and women living to-day who know that Jesus Christ hath power on earth to forgive sins. Time was when the sense of their own guilt was to them an intolerable burden. But they came to Christ; to Him they confessed their sin, from Him they received forgiveness, and in Him they now have peace. That is a fact which, as James Smetham says in one of his *Letters*, "is as great and simple as the facts of seeing and hearing"; and it is a fact which must be accounted for.

Nor is that all. There are multitudes living

to-day who have been rescued from the power of evil habit. Only the other day I met a man who, less than a year ago, was living in open adultery, and a victim of the drink besides; but in a Methodist chapel the mercy of God arrested him, and now his whole life is completely revolutionised. Have you never known such among your own acquaintances—drunken, lazy, good-for-nothing fellows, till one day some “mission,” or perhaps the Salvation Army, laid hold of them, and, as we Methodists say, they were “soundly converted,” and since then they have been, literally, new men? An eminent evangelist once declared in a newspaper controversy that he was prepared any day, at a few hours’ notice, to summon five hundred witnesses, ready to declare under oath, if need be, the truth of that Gospel of salvation from the power of sin which every week he preached.

This then is the testimony of the healed man; what have you to say to it? Some of you have pronounced against Christianity, but you have never yet heard the chief witness. *The healed man*—that is the unanswered, the unanswerable argument for Christianity. *How to account for him*—that is the unsolved, the insoluble problem of unbelief, and a problem, moreover, which unbelief has never yet fairly tackled. There is Colonel Ingersoll, for example; he makes huge jokes about the “mistakes of Moses”; for a whole hour by the clock he empties upon the Bible the little vials of

his scornful mirth ; and the reports of his addresses are punctuated with "laughter," "loud laughter," "roars of laughter." But when the fun is over, does not the question still remain, What about the healed man? I often think I should like to see the Colonel face to face with such a man as I have in my mind. I think he would say to the witty sceptic something like this : "Well, sir, this is all very clever, but now listen to me. Two years ago I was a poor devil-hunted wretch ; the drink had made of me a fiend, and of my home a hell. I had a wife, but she had no husband. I had children, but they had no father. I was a brute, and worse than a brute. But Jesus Christ met me, and now everything is changed. You can see it for yourself if you will. Now, sir, you have 'explained' a great deal, will you 'explain' ME?" "Seeing the man that was healed"—yes, but that is the very thing men of the stamp of Colonel Ingersoll will not see ; the healed man is persistently ignored—"they could say nothing against it": not a very satisfactory result, yet if all felt at least a like obligation to silence ! That some should pass Christianity by and neglect it is not perhaps greatly to be wondered at ; but that any should greet it with scorn and contempt, that they should take up arms against it, this surely is passing strange. To break down the fence that has kept the wanderer from the dangerous pitfall, to put out the light that has warned the mariner off the sunken reef, to tear down the hut that has sheltered the traveller from the pitiless

storm, to smash in pieces the old medicine bottles that have brought healing and strength to the sin-sick soul,—to seek to do all this, and to have nothing, absolutely nothing, to offer in their stead, is there any sorrier, more thankless task to which a man can put his hand? If only they who seek to do these things could for one moment see matters from the healed man's point of view! Once when Jesus had opened the eyes of a man born blind, His enemies said of Him, "He hath a devil, and is mad: why hear ye Him?" I have often wondered what the man whose eyes had been opened thought of that. My friend, if you can as yet go no farther, at least, when you see the healed man standing in the midst, *say nothing against it.*

But I cannot break off there. It is not enough for me that I shut you up in a corner and compel you to be silent, or at most wring from you a reluctant admission that possibly there may be "something in religion" after all. I want you to come to the healed man's Christ, and to try for yourself the healed man's salvation.

Is not your need that of the lame man—strength, moral strength, will-power? And if you do not get it from Christ, where will you get it? In what other name given among men is there salvation? I can fancy others besides Peter standing over that helpless cripple at the temple gate and speaking to him. Here is one hopeless, sad-eyed, and muttering scraps of science:

"In the name of the survival of the fittest, thou art damned. Weak art thou, and to the wall shalt thou go." And this is Mr. Rigidly-righteous, with knitted brow and thin, stern lips: "Who shall pity thee? Thy own sin hath brought thee here. Evil hast thou done, and the penalty must thou pay." Here, too, comes Miss Philanthropy, with her good-natured smile and easy ways: "Silver and gold will I give thee; another crutch, better and stronger, for thee to hobble along with." And there is another who, with his little load of petty maxims, might have dwelt in Bunyan's village of Morality: "In the name of morality, in the name of social respectability, in thy own name stand upon thy feet; walk; be good; henceforth sin no more." But never does the lame man receive strength. Now let Peter speak: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. . . . And immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength."

"To ask alms"—the cripple hoped for nothing beyond that, and it is all that anything short of the Gospel can give. It alleviates, it soothes, but it cannot cure. It puts its handful of snow on the fevered brow, but the disease itself lies too deep for its touch. It props up the lame with its crutches; it can never give strength to the feet. None but Christ can do that.

Then why do you not come to Christ? Surely this is a reasonable appeal to make. Despite all that has been so often urged to the contrary, I fear

some of you are still haunted by the delusion that in order to receive the blessing of Christ we must be able to thread our way through certain elaborate intellectual processes ; there must first be the submission of the mind to a number of more or less difficult theological dogmas. Nothing of the kind ! Let me tell you why I am a Christian. It is not simply because my mind has been satisfied as to the truth of certain doctrines concerning God, the creation, the Bible, the future, and so on. No degree of intellectual conviction on these points could have ever made me a Christian. No ; I am a Christian because, if I know myself, I want, above everything else, to live a good and useful life, and my own experience has proved to me that I can only do this in the measure in which I bow to Christ, and make Him King and Lord of my whole being.

And I make my appeal to you on precisely the same ground. I absolutely refuse to be drawn off into the discussion of questions which, whatever intellectual interest they may possess, are just now and at this stage wholly irrelevant. I pin you down to the facts about yourself and Jesus Christ. There, on the one side, is your need, real and desperate ; there, on the other, is Christ's proffered help, and behind Him the saints of sixty generations, affirming that what He promises He is able to perform. Will you make the venture ? If it comes to naught, it will but leave you where you are now ; if it succeeds, you will get what

most of all you need. But, once more I beseech you, keep your eye fixed on the main thing ; do not be led away on mere side issues.

I talked with a man some few days ago who had become the victim of a habit that was threatening him with ruin. When I spoke to him of the power of religion, he raised the old stock-in-trade difficulties about the Old Testament. He was a poor drowning wretch, quarrelling with his life-belt. **And that is what some of you are doing. Put it on, man ; put it on ! It has kept many a man's head above water, and, if you will wear it, it will keep yours.** . . .

"The man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed." And the meaning of that for us is just this : that however long-standing, however deep-rooted our malady may be, it is not too desperate for Him. "Who-soever will may come and be healed" ; and if only we have not lost the power to "will," then we are not too bad, and it is not too late. "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

THE NAMELESS PROPHET: A STUDY
IN CONSCIENCE

*"And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word
of the Lord unto Beth-el."—1 KINGS xiii. 1.*

XII

THE NAMELESS PROPHET : A STUDY IN CONSCIENCE

THIS "man of God" is not one of the great figures of the Bible. Nobody thinks of putting him by the side of Moses, or Elijah, or Isaiah. Beyond what is told us of him in this one chapter, we know nothing ; even his name is lost. There is, it is true, a reference to his tomb in the Second Book of Kings (xxiii. 17), but it is still only a nameless slab. Nevertheless, there is much that we may learn alike from the story of his weakness and of his strength. His message is indeed no new one, yet perhaps the very unfamiliarity of his face and strangeness of his voice may gain for him a hearing where others better known would fail.

In order the better to appreciate the prophet's message, let us glance for a moment at the circumstances out of which the events of this chapter arose. It was a momentous period in the history of the people of God. The folly of Rehoboam,

the son of Solomon, had ended in the revolt of the Ten Tribes and the rending of the kingdom. Judah alone remained faithful to the house of David. The rival kingdom of Israel had been established in the north, and Jeroboam had been elected its first king.

Of the results that followed this unhappy division we are concerned now with but one. So great a political revolution could not but affect very deeply the religious life of the tribes who thus broke away from their old allegiance. Of that life Jerusalem had been hitherto the centre. There was the Temple, there the priests, there the place where men ought to worship. But Jerusalem was now no longer theirs ; it lay beyond their boundary in a hostile territory. The significance of all this so far-seeing a monarch as Jeroboam was not slow to recognise. On the one hand, he saw that it would never do to allow his people to continue to go up to Jerusalem to worship. "Let Jerusalem remain the religious capital of the two states," he argued, pointedly enough, "and she will soon again be the political capital also." "If," he said, "this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah ; and they shall kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah."¹ On the other hand, Jeroboam knew full well that he could not afford to ignore the religious sentiment

¹ 1 Kings xii. 27.

of his people : like some modern masters of statecraft, he knew the worth of religion as a politician, if he did not as a man. We are often told nowadays to make our politics part of our religion. Jeroboam took the very opposite course : he made his religion part of his politics ; and by a master-stroke of political expediency he established the forms of religion for his people in their very midst. He made two golden calves, and set up the one in Dan, the other in Bethel ; he selected priests and ordained a feast, "like unto the feast that is in Judah," and himself went up, on the day of the feast, to the altar which he had made in Bethel, to burn incense.¹

Then it was that, heralded by no word of warning, this nameless prophet of God breaks in upon the scene. He had witnessed the idolatry of Israel till he could bear it no longer. He had heard the voice of God bidding him cry aloud and spare not, till the word burned in his heart like a fire. And now with startling abruptness, and the magnificent daring of those old Hebrew prophets, in the presence of the king, and by the side of his own altar, he denounces, in the name of God, the worship which he has set up. "O altar, altar," he cried, "thus saith the Lord : Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name ; and upon thee shall he sacrifice the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall they burn upon

¹ 1 Kings xii. 28-32.

thee." And even as he speaks, the altar is rent and the ashes poured out. It was like a bolt from the blue. "Lay hold on him," cries the king; and, too maddened with rage to wait for his command to be obeyed, he thrust forth his own hand to seize the prophet. But in a moment it is stiff and withered, and he cannot take it back again to himself. The prophet has done his plain but difficult duty, and God has vindicated His servant.

And now see how the king changes his tone. He "said unto the man of God, Intreat now the favour of the Lord thy God; and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again." And the prophet prayed, and it was so. "And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward." It is ever the world's way; it will bully its prophets, and seek to gag and silence them, and when that is useless it will cringe and fawn, and slip its petty bribes into their hand: "See, I will give thee a reward. Prophesy unto us smooth things." But this man of God is as proof against flattery as against fear. He said unto the king, "If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so was it charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Thou shalt eat no bread, nor drink water, neither return by the way that thou camest."

One could wish that the story ended there.

But, alas! the clay mingled with the metal, the mud with the marble; and the day that had opened so splendidly hastened to a mean and mournful close. Yet do not let us withhold from this prophet the meed of admiration that is his due. I remember hearing a minister pray that we might have strength to speak the difficult right word, to do the difficult right deed. Once, at least, that power had been this man's. Therein his life was redeemed from utter failure. Surely there was something of the true moral hero in him. Men who can take their stand as he did are a public conscience; they are the salt to keep a nation's life sweet and good; they are a break-water against the fierce, swift tides of national wrongdoing. We may not, and we cannot, forget the prophet's after failure; but in the moment when he withstood Jeroboam to his face, this nameless man of God was no unworthy forerunner of Elijah and Isaiah.

Now let us turn to the other side of the story. There is no need to linger over its details. The man of God set out on his homeward journey. But in the meanwhile tidings of his remarkable errand had come to an old prophet who dwelt in Bethel. No sooner does he learn what has happened than he goes in search of the man of Judah. When he has found him, he prefers a similar request to Jeroboam's: "Come home with me, and eat bread"; and receives a similar answer: "I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee:

neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place : for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest." "But," urges the old man, "I also am a prophet as thou art ; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water." Then the younger man yields, and the two go back together. "*But he lied unto him.*"

Why this man of Bethel was so anxious to persuade his brother prophet we are not told, and it is not worth while to guess. But is there not something unutterably sad in the picture of that old man himself leading the way into the crooked path of evil? We are all of us ready to deal charitably with the blunders of youth. "God Himself"—it is one of Mr. Barrie's beautiful sayings—"is willing to give a second chance to one-and-twenty." But what shall we say when our confidence in age, our trust in gray hairs, is so shamefully abused. It is sad enough, God knows, when youth leads youth astray ; but what when age itself is the corrupter, when it laughs at the tender sensitiveness of youth, and sneers down its heaven-sent enthusiasms? Oh, you gray-headed men and women, I know not how God Himself will forgive you if in this way you are doing the devil's work ! It was of such as you that Christ said that it were better for you that a millstone

were hanged about your neck, and you were cast into the depths of the sea.

The rest of the story is soon told. Seated at the table together, a sudden inspiration seizes the old prophet, and, with a touch of terrible irony, he is made the messenger of death to the man he has deceived. Then the simple meal is ended, and the younger man goes forth to meet his doom. And when a few hours later it is whispered through the little town that a man has been killed by a lion, the old prophet needs no one to tell him who it is. He dropped an unavailing tear on the grave of the man he had wronged. "When I am dead," he said, "then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried ; lay my bones beside his bones" ; and there the story ends.

What is the lesson of it for us ? This, that for us God's word to us is final. This prophet had a command from God ; but he let himself be argued out of his convictions, and there is the result.

It may be said that this man of God had means of knowing the will of God which are no longer within our reach. That matters nothing, even if it be true. God speaks to us not less certainly than He spoke to the greatest of the prophets. Conscience is the voice of God in the soul ; and the lesson of this man's sad fall is just this, that above that word of God in the heart there is nothing. Argue with it, silence it, go past it or behind it, and you are undone.

Yet do not misunderstand. When I say that conscience is supreme, I mean that its decision is supreme for *me*, and for *me now*. It is not, therefore, necessarily supreme for another, or even for me always. More light to-morrow may mean a new duty to-morrow. But as conscience directs to-day so must be my life to-day.

Now, as I said at the beginning, there is nothing new in this. The only kind of "distinction" which this narrative can claim as an illustration of an old truth lies, perhaps, in the fact that the tempter came arrayed as an angel of light; the light that led astray seemed as light from heaven. The man of God, who had stood undaunted before a king, neither to be bullied into silence nor to be coaxed into compliance, yields to a prophet. "He is older, wiser than I,"—so he may have argued with himself,—“is he not a prophet also? Is he not as likely as I to know what is right? Why should I pit my word, my conviction against his?”

Have we never argued so? Some course of action is suggested to us. We have our doubts about it—very decided scruples, it may be; but we take it, and screen ourselves behind another's example: "He is a good man, and he does it; why may not I?" Have we never argued so, I say? Then the answer is brief, simple, irresistible: we must obey our own conscience, we must be true to our own conviction, just because it is ours, because it is God's voice to us. With God's word

to another, real or imaginary, we have nothing whatever to do, so long as we have a clear word of our own to guide us.

Let me take one simple illustration. A young man has, let us say, very strong scruples about theatre-going. But one day he reads in a newspaper that this or that eminent minister was at the play last week ; and then with that newspaper paragraph he smothers the voice that says he ought not. Understand I am not discussing a particular question, but, what is far more important, I am trying to establish a great moral principle valid for a hundred questions, and I say, let no man's words, no man's life, however great and good he may be, override your own clear convictions. He who does what you are not free to do may be in every respect a better man than you are—a man whose shoe-latchet you are not worthy to stoop down and unloose ; and you may shrink from the unspoken judgment upon his life which your action seems to pronounce ; but you have no alternative ; *you may not follow his example*. The road that way leads not to moral freedom, but to moral death. "To thine own self be true"—it is God's eternal law, and outside of it there is no safety.

Two questions which the reading of this narrative very naturally suggests I must attempt briefly to answer before I conclude.

1. Was it not, so it may be asked, the veriest of trifles over which this moral struggle was fought

and lost—a mere question of eating and drinking? “Trifle,” did you say? But what if behind that trifle there “lurk the whole question of the soul’s loyalty to known truth”? I passed last summer through the little Swiss town of Atdorf. It was there, according to the famous old legend, that the tyrant Gessler hung up his hat for the villagers to bow to as they passed. **It was a very little thing to be told to do, and it is no wonder if most of them thought, “Better bow your head than lose it.” But one man there was—so at least the story runs—who saw the full meaning of that simple act: to bow to Gessler’s cap meant submission to the Austrian yoke; and the proud soul of William Tell refused to bend. Ah! yes; a very tiny straw may be enough to show which way the wind blows, and the mightiest issues may lie wrapped up in what seem the meanest trifles. Europe is not all Mont Blancs; we have many a mile of flat land around Edinburgh, but only one Arthur’s Seat; and the lives of most of us are humdrum and commonplace enough. We have to fight our Waterloos over trifles; and if we are careless about these, I tell you it will go hardly with us in the great battle of life.**

2. Again, it may perhaps be asked, was not the man of God in our narrative over-scrupulous? Why should he not have eaten and drunk at the old prophet’s invitation? Is it right to allow our conscience to be burdened with unreasonable commands, with senseless prohibitions?

I grant the possibility of an over-development of moral sensitiveness. I do not know that many of us are in danger of it, but undoubtedly there are some who suffer from what a writer in the *Spectator* has called *hypertrophy* of conscience.¹ And parents and teachers do well to take heed lest by needless injunctions and restrictions they foster this wholly unreal, diseased form of conscientiousness. Nevertheless, it remains true, at all costs conscience must be obeyed. The deliverance we seek, whichever way it may come, can never come by the path of disobedience.

How the prophet became convinced that he must neither eat bread nor drink water in Bethel, nor return by the way which he came, and what was the purpose of such a command, we are not told. We may conjecture, but we shall as likely be wrong as right, and really it is not of the slightest consequence. The important point is this, the prophet was convinced, convinced that the will of God had been made known to him: "So was it charged me by the word of the Lord . . . it was said to me by the word of the Lord ;" here is his own twice-repeated declaration. You may say he was mistaken if you like, yet he believed God had said to him, "This thing shalt thou do," and that for him should have been the end of all controversy. Hear, then, the conclusion

¹ Hypertrophy (a medical term) is the exact opposite of atrophy, and means an abnormal enlargement (from *ὑπέρ* over, and *τροφή* nourishment).

of the whole matter : when conscience speaks, we are not called upon to justify to any one, not even to ourselves, that which it bids us do. There is one and but one safe path, and it is the path of obedience.

Do you remember the answer of Peter and the apostles to the high priest? "We straitly charged you," said the high priest, "not to teach in this name : and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." "*We must obey God rather than men,*" said the apostles. This simple, unconscious heroism, that casts no sidelong glances of admiration at itself in the glass, that never stops to think how fine a thing it is doing, but does the right just because it is right,—is it not this that you and I need? And where did these men learn it? Let their enemies tell us : "And when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they took knowledge of them, that *they had been with Jesus.*" There is the secret : if you covet this holy boldness, be with Jesus. God forgive me if I ever preach a sermon that does not help somebody to get nearer to Him!

And there is more in this perhaps than we think. As I have reminded you before,¹ the greatest forces in life are personal. Our lives are fashioned by thoughts, ideals, books, but most of all by living men who love us. These "uphold

¹ See page 109.

us, cherish us" when all things else are nothing. "Quit you like men, be strong"—sometimes the old words thrill us like a bugle-blast at early morn : no task is too difficult, no hill too steep. And then again the weary feet drag heavily, and the tired hands fall slack and nerveless at our side. It is not books, or examples, or precepts we want now—these do but mock us—but the helpful counsel, the strong arm of the living voice, the loving friend : it is companionship, friendship we crave for.

Such companionship, such friendship, not for difficult hours only, but for all life, is offered to you. "The strong Son of God" says to us, the weakest and unworthiest of us, "I have called *thee* friend." Will you make that friendship yours? Will you seek His face? Will you live in His presence?

MODERN IDOLATRY

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols."—I JOHN V. 21.

XIII

MODERN IDOLATRY

THESE are John's last words to those whom, in his affectionate, old man's way, he addresses as "little children"; probably if the books of the Bible were arranged in the order in which they were written, they would be seen to be the last words of Scripture also.

Whatever wider significance we may give to this parting injunction of the Apostle's, it does not seem necessary to exclude the literal meaning. John was writing to Christians who had long ago abandoned all worship of idols of gold or silver or stone, graven by art and device of man. Yet in such a city as Ephesus, where, hardly more than a generation ago, such a scene was possible as Luke has described for us in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts, it may well have been that even Christian men still needed to hear the old command: "Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me." Nevertheless it was not only against such idols that John was warning his readers. "Idol" in his vocabulary

means anything that comes between us and God, anything that takes for us the place of God. John had just been speaking in the verses preceding my text) of that knowledge of the true God unto which in Jesus Christ his readers had attained ; and now he bids them take heed that nothing and nobody come between them and Him. His words are a warning against idolatry in its widest and largest meaning.

But before I pass on to speak of these words in that understanding of them, there is one other point I want you to notice. How are we to explain this solemn warning against idolatry in an epistle which pays throughout the profoundest homage to Jesus Christ? It is worth while observing how profound that homage is. Take passages like these, culled almost at random :—

“Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?”—ii. 22.

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God”—v. 1.

“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God : every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God : and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God”—iv. 2, 3.

“And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us”—v. 14.

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God”—iv. 15.

What are we to make of this? One of two things: either John, who was, remember, for three years a personal follower of Christ's, and who writes in this Epistle from first-hand knowledge of the things of which he speaks,¹—either, I say, John believed that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and Himself equal with God, or he stands self-convicted of the stupidest inconsistency, the flattest blasphemy. A learned Berlin professor,² who has recently been lecturing in our city,³ has spoken of Jesus as "a simple, trustful religious genius, preaching a sweet Gospel of the love of God to the multitudes of Galilee."⁴ John knew no such Jesus. If we cannot be certain of that, we might despair of being certain of anything. I have read of a Roman emperor who kept a statue of Jesus and a statue of Plato side by side in his pantheon. It is so that Dr. Pfleiderer treats Jesus; but, since He is *primus inter pares*, He gets a pedestal twelve inches bigger than the rest. Now that is a doctrine which the Christian Church from the first century to the nineteenth has always strenuously denied. For three centuries after Christ no Christian thinker dared to make Him one in a row, as Dr. Pfleiderer has done. The New Testament

¹ "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life . . . declare we unto you" (i. 1, 3).

² Professor Pfleiderer.

³ Edinburgh.

⁴ These are not Dr. Pfleiderer's own words, but express, I believe, his views with perfect accuracy.

writers were no believers in "hero-worship"; Paul and Barnabas reject in hot haste the attempted sacrifice of the multitudes of Lystra. But the homage they will not receive for themselves they freely pay to Christ. John warns his readers against idols; the stern monotheism of his ancient faith ran in his very blood, and yet, with no sense of inconsistency, he bids them bow to Jesus.

I do not want to seem intolerant. I do not want to put my Bible under a glass case and to say to the critic, "Hands off there!" Let him sift and dissect and analyse as he please. But if, when his work is done, he offers me some poor pale ghost, and says "this is your Jesus"; if he brings me back a faith emptied of miracle, of prayer, of immortality, and says "this is His Gospel,"—no, a thousand times no! If you want that Christ, take Him; He is not John's Christ; He is not mine. If that faith can help you, be it so; lean upon it; but, mark, *it is not Christianity*. Call it what you please, but do not steal for it the Christian name. That was not the creed of the first century; it is not the creed of the nineteenth. It was not so our fathers believed; neither so will their sons believe after them. Not yet, on the world-scale at least, has this new gospel proved itself to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Who among us is an idolater? "Among us?"

Yes, among us. "But we know that an idol is nothing in the world ; and though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, yet to *us* there is one God, the Father. We subscribe to Foreign Missions, we—" But stay ; do not let us play with the surface-meaning of words. Worship is a thing of the spirit. What a man trusts in, that is his god. You may never have bowed the knee to an idol made with hands, and as far back as you can remember you may have daily bowed the knee to God, and yet you may be an idolater. I have seen a great congregation bow as the preacher said "Let us pray," and it seemed as if all were worshipping. But while man looketh on the outward appearance, God looketh at the heart, and *He* said, "This people"—this man, that woman—"honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." When the wise men come seeking the infant Saviour, Herod bids them "bring me word that I may come and worship Him also"; yet all the while his hand is feeling for his sword, that he may redden it in little children's blood ! Call you that worship ?

Put these two words of the Apostle Paul's side by side : "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ" (Rom. i. 1) ; "God . . . whom I serve in my spirit" (*ib.* i. 9).¹ Whom do I serve ? In the outer sphere of life, in the eyes of men, God. But "in my spirit,"

¹ Note the correct rendering of the R.V. "*in* my spirit," not "*with* my spirit" as in A.V.

whom? what? For remember, as some one has truly said, "A man's true worship is not the worship which he performs in the public temple, but that which he offers down in that little private chapel where nobody goes but himself."¹ The deities that are shrined *there*, these be thy gods, be thy offerings elsewhere what they may.

So once again I put the question, Who among us is an idolater? We smile when we are told—to take but one instance out of multitudes—of North American Indians who to this day worship their bow and arrows; yet theirs is an idol good and benign by the side of the unclean deities that some of us have fashioned for ourselves, and are bowing down to every day. Let us take the Bible in our hand and search out some of the dark corners of our hearts.

"*Whose god is their belly,*"² That is idolatry in its most repulsive, disgusting form. Gluttony, Drunkenness, Lust—to bow down before these is to worship the Beast, and to bear his mark in our foreheads. Swift and terrible is the retribution. When Moses came down from the mount with the two tables of stone in his hand, and saw the dancing and heard the shouts of the idol-worshippers, we are told that "he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it." The grim irony of it! Do none of us know what

¹ Dr. Maclaren.

² Phil. iii. 19.

it is to have that bitter draught pressed to our lips? "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath kicked thee off"¹—we need no preacher to tell us what that means. "All this will I give thee," said the tempter, "this—and this—and this—and this—all this will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." You struck the bargain, and there you stand to-day a befooled and cheated man. "All this"? what was it? A passing thrill—a momentary titillation of a nerve—Dead Sea fruit that turned to ashes in your mouth.

"*Covetousness, which is idolatry.*"² Paul tells the Ephesians that the covetous man is an idolater; writing to men who had turned from idols to serve a living and true God, he yet warns them that if they yield to covetousness they will become entangled again in the yoke of idolatry. Does not that word smite some of us? We never bowed the knee to Gluttony or Lust or Drunkenness; we do not sin vulgarly; we even look down with a Pharisee's proud pity upon them that do. And yet all the week through and all the year round we jostle with the crowd that pay their obsequious homage to the "gilded beast" of wealth. Of all forms of modern idolatry none is more fatal than this. From some we are saved by their very coarseness. We may yield once, or even twice, but their unredeemed vulgarity becomes an effectual check. But the appetite of avarice

¹ This is one out of several possible renderings of a difficult text.

² Col. iii. 5; comp. Eph. v. 5.

grows by what it feeds on ; the desire to get is a deadly octopus that fastens itself upon the soul and will not be shaken off. "And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things ; and they scoffed at Him." That is the last penalty of the mammon-worshipper : he grows dead to all things else. The publican and harlot shall enter into the kingdom of God while he is shut out, while he does not so much as know that there is a kingdom to be entered. "Ye cannot"—not simply "may not," but "*cannot*"—"serve God and mammon."

"*And Hezekiah brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made : for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it : and he called it Nehushtan.*"¹ Now we are in another world altogether. What does this mean ? That it is possible for us to turn even the sacred things of religion into idols that come between us and God. The brazen serpent was the Divinely-appointed symbol of a Divine act. But the children of Israel made of it a fetish, and burned incense to it, and put it in the place of God. Then arose Hezekiah, the reformer and iconoclast, and took the ancient symbol of deliverance into his strong hands : "This that you are worshipping," he cried, "what is it ? Nehushtan—a piece of brass" ; and he brake it in pieces before their eyes. It is the ever-recurring danger of the Christian Church, to allow our symbols, our

¹ 2 Kings xviii. 4. ("Nehushtan," *i.e.* a piece of brass.)

sacraments, our services, ay, and even our Bibles, to come between us and the living God—so to think of them that we cease to think of Him. Every one who knows anything of contemporary religious life, especially south of the Border, knows that there is no graver peril menacing our faith to-day than this materialism within the Churches. The blessed results of that mighty spiritual awakening at Oxford fifty years or so ago, which we associate with the names of Newman, Pusey, and Keble, no one, Anglican or Nonconformist, can wish to deny. But equally undeniable is it that in these latter days the good seed is being choked by those enormous and portentous sacerdotal and sacramentarian growths which have sprung up side by side with it. We have just been told on excellent authority¹ that “the number of Anglican churches in England and Wales has almost doubled since 1882, and is now 5957. At 250 incense is used; at 406 there is a daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist; the much-discussed ‘eastward position’ is adopted at no fewer than 5037; ‘Eucharistic vestments’ are worn at 1370, and altar-lights are employed during the sacrament of the Eucharist at 2707.” In the multiplication of Christian churches we may all heartily rejoice; for the rest, I frankly confess it brings back to memory a saying of Dr. Marcus Dods’, that one of the crying needs of

¹ See *The Tourists’ Church Guide*, by Lord Halifax. My quotation is taken from the *Daily Chronicle*.

the Church to-day is a satirist. That these monstrous growths which are darkening the very heavens might be smitten with the withering sarcasm that fell from the lips of God's prophet of old on the idols of the heathen! We may be wrong, but to some of us it seems as if the days were fast ripening for the coming of another Hezekiah—another Knox, another Cromwell—who shall fling our once cherished symbols to the bats and the moles, and cry, "Nehushtan!—in the Lord God of hosts be your trust, and not in these things!" "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

I have only touched upon one or two of the forms of our modern idolatry. It may be that in none of these forms does the temptation to forget God in His creatures present itself to us in its strongest and subtlest form. We may never have been in danger of ecclesiastical idolatry. "The narrowing lust of gold" may never have burned in our souls. From idol-worship in its grosser, coarser forms our whole nature may recoil with honest loathing. And yet we too may be offering our real worship to an idol and not to God.

Never, perhaps, have we held in so high esteem as to-day the things that are most worthy of it. Writers like Wordsworth and Ruskin have opened our eyes to the beautiful in art and nature. Beauty holds us to-day with a spell our fathers

never knew. Literature, too, has brought its priceless treasures to our very door ; and now the very poorest and humblest of us may tread in the footsteps of Shakespeare and Milton, of Scott and Tennyson, and think after them the thoughts of the wisest and best. Then comes the temptation, so subtle and so strong—how subtle and how strong let them say who have felt it—to count these things the first things, the supreme things in life. A religious faith—so many an educated young man may be tempted to think—to those whose lives are starved and poor, to whom it comes as their one escape into the infinite from the narrow, grimy round of daily toil, may be of priceless worth ; but to me with my wider outlook and far-stretching horizons and hundred windows that look out into eternity, what can it bring to me? But *is* there nothing that we need beyond what these things—art and literature and science—can give to us? Did you ever ponder this deep saying, “They that make them shall be like unto them; yea, every one that trusteth in them”? *Your gods cannot lift you beyond themselves.* At the Art Congress in Liverpool in 1889, Sir Frederick Leighton complained that in so many of our countrymen “the perception of beauty is blunt, and the desire for it sluggish and superficial;” and he contrasted us in this respect with what has been revealed in the buried ruins of Pompeii, where even “the appliances of the kitchen and pantry form a museum of art of inexhaustible

fascination." We may frankly admit the truth of the indictment; yet no one knows better than Sir Frederick Leighton that even in beauty-loving Pompeii abominations flourished that it is a shame even to speak of, and that pictures have been revealed there which the excavators had to cover up because they were so foul. A great student of Italian life and literature¹ has told us that the idolatry of beauty in Italy ended at last in the degradation both of art and character.

To say that art and literature must not be as gods to us, is not to deny them their place in our life: it is to deny them the first place. The great powers of the world in which we now pass our days, says Dean Church, "are not the powers for man—man the responsible, man the sinner and the penitent, who may be the saint—to fall down and worship . . . *they* at least feel this who are drawing near to the unseen and unknown beyond; they to whom, it may be, these great gifts of God, the spell and wonder of art and literature, the glory and sweet tenderness of nature, have been the brightness and joy of days that are now fast ending; *they* feel there is yet an utter want of what these things cannot give; that soul and heart want something yet deeper, something more lovely, something more Divine—that which will realise man's ideals, that which will complete and fulfil his incompleteness and his helplessness—*yes, the real likeness, in thought and*

¹ Dean Church.

*will and character, to the goodness of Jesus Christ."*¹

I claim the first place for my Lord. I may not have named your idol by name; but whatever it be, make haste to put it from you. Till then your life is as a kingdom where the wrong man is on the throne; there can be no settled peace till He whose right it is to reign come to His own. Make Him first in everything. Nay, He can take no other place. It cuts me to the heart when I plead with you to give up all and follow Christ, and you say, "Yes, yes; Christ was a great and good man; the greatest and the best of men, indeed." He does not want your patronage: He calls for your submission. Do not bring to Him the little penny-pieces of your respect, saying, "Hail, Master, this will we give Thee." You yourselves are His: render, therefore, to this Cæsar the things that are His.

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee."

¹ Rather a long quotation, but I let it stand as one of the last utterances of one of the finest Christian scholars of his generation (see p. 53). The italics in the last sentence are mine.

A YOUNG MAN'S DIFFICULTIES WITH
HIS BIBLE

XIV

A YOUNG MAN'S DIFFICULTIES WITH HIS BIBLE.

[The following address was delivered at a usual Sunday evening service in answer to a number of questions addressed to me privately by young men. This fact is the explanation of the choice of subjects dealt with. To many of my readers the discussion may seem stale and profitless, and, I admit, had the points been of my own choosing they would have been very different. But I think it best to allow the address to remain as it was delivered, not without the hope that, however useless the first part may prove, the considerations urged in the second will be felt to be valid by all who have difficulties with their Bibles of whatsoever kind.]

I PROPOSE in this address to deal with a little batch of questions which I have received from various correspondents—all of them, I believe, young men.

But first let me say with what honest delight I always receive communications of this kind. When Christ was here amongst men, the people He drew to Him were people in difficulty ; and for a Christian minister there can be no worse punishment than to be let alone. What vexes me is that

when inquirers bring their difficulties, they so often think it necessary to preface them with apologies. Fancy any one in trouble going to Jesus with a "sorry to disturb you, Sir," on his lips! What would have "disturbed" Christ—and what ought to disturb us—would have been if nobody had disturbed Him. I always remember the saying of a good old Methodist preacher: "**The man that wants me is the man I want.**"

The points raised by my correspondents are none of them new. Yet the difficulties are evidently felt as real; and they are urged with genuine sincerity and earnestness. I will try to deal with them in a similar spirit. The plan I shall adopt is this: first, we will look at the difficulties singly, and then we will ask, how should the existence of these affect our personal relation to the Gospel of Christ? "The Bible," says one of my correspondents, "is my stumbling-block"; I shall try to show you that even if, as is likely enough, I say little to remove your difficulties, there is still no good reason why you should not enter at once the service of Christ.

I

1. The first point to be dealt with is not exactly a Biblical difficulty, but I meet with it so often, and as it is raised again in this correspondence, I cannot pass it by without a word. "What," says one of my querists, "about the

evil lives of so many professed Christians?" and he clinches his question with a reference to a shameful moral delinquency on the part of a minister of the Gospel.¹ The facts I sorrowfully admit; but let me ask my friend, Does he really think his implication a just and fair one? Over against his disgraced minister I set a drunkard reformed by the preaching of the Cross; is it any less certain that Christ has no responsibility for the downfall of the one than it is that He is wholly responsible for the uplifting of the other? My friend speaks of his "pain," in which all good men share, at such sad spectacles as this that he refers to, but does he not see that he is practically admitting that when professed Christians go astray it is because they do *not* obey the teaching of Christ, that their wrongdoing is not because of, but in spite of their religious profession, and that therefore no blame is to be laid at the door of religion itself? Do let us be reasonable. You do not judge of a doctor's skill by his failure to cure patients who refuse to take his prescribed remedies. A captain has a compass on board, but he never looks at it, and by and by he lands his vessel on the rocks. Is a ship's compass, therefore, not a good thing? The Bible must be judged not by what it fails to do for those who, what-

¹ The reference was to an unhappy incident associated with the meeting of the Church Assemblies in Edinburgh in May of last year; but as nothing is to be gained by repeating the facts here, I omit them.

ever they may *say*, never consult it and refuse to obey it, but by what it can do for those who do. And I challenge any man to tell me of one who made this book his guide through life, and yet ended at last among the breakers? You tell me you know a great many so-called Christians who are hard, and selfish, and grasping, and narrow : so do I ; but that is nothing to the point. The question is, what does Christ say about them ?

2. Another correspondent asks how it is possible to believe that wise and great men who lived and died before Christ came, men like Socrates, *e.g.*, are to be consigned to everlasting destruction. I confess I do not quite understand a question like this. My friend and I surely must read different Bibles. I certainly do not believe any such horrible doctrine as his query suggests ; and, what is much more to the point, I can find nothing in my Bible that even hints at it. He says that this is the "teaching of preachers and others." What preachers? Can any man under thirty call to mind a single instance in his own experience of such a doctrine being taught by the accredited teachers of any Christian Church? Has he ever read anything of the kind in any book written by Christian thinker or preacher during the last fifty years? I know something of the pulpit literature of recent years, but I cannot recall a solitary example ; whereas in five minutes I could put my hand on a score of volumes in which any such idea is scouted with indignation.

But, after all, it is not a question of what preachers preach, but of what the Bible says? Astronomers may mislead us, but the stars are always there to correct both them and us. What then does the Bible say? "The times of ignorance," Paul told the Athenians in his famous discourse on Mars Hill, "God overlooked; but now He commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent." "God is no respecter of persons," said Peter, "but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him." Should not words like these banish forever any such hideous fear as darkens my friend's imagination? The teaching of Christ Himself is equally unmistakable. What a glorious breadth of promise is there in words like these: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold: and them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd"; or, in these again: "I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven"—Marcus Aurelius will be among these, wrote John Wesley in his Journals when he had been reading the wise words of the great Roman thinker—"but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness." This is language unequivocal enough surely. Can my interrogator quote one single New Testament sentence that contradicts it?

3. Another question which lies before me may be answered in the same way—by a simple

statement of the facts. It is astonishing how many of these "difficulties" are thus made to vanish into thin air. I am asked—I suppose for the thousandth time—how the Bible comes to speak of David as "a man after God's own heart," when, according to its own showing, he was guilty of the double crime of murder and adultery. From the way in which the question is generally put, one might almost suppose that the favourable judgment of Heaven followed immediately upon the perpetration of David's sin. What are the actual facts? In 1 Sam. xiii. 14 we read (Samuel is the speaker): "The Lord had sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath appointed him to be prince over His people"; that is to say, David is called a man after God's own heart while as yet Saul is upon the throne, and he himself is an innocent shepherd youth keeping his father's flock. When do we read of David's great transgression? Not until we come to 2 Sam. xii., or nearly a lifetime later in the history. Samuel pronounced this remarkable judgment on a pure, high-minded youth, who in his old age, and long years after the prophet had been in his grave, fell into the most grievous sin. Where then is the difficulty? Moreover, do not let us suppose that the Bible left it to us to condemn David's wrongdoing. I have heard low-thoughted men half insinuate that the Old Testament had a kind of sneaking sympathy with adultery and murder. What a monstrous iniquity! Let a man read

over the first fourteen verses of 2 Sam. xii. (in which David's condemnation and punishment are declared by Nathan), let him remember how low was the world's best morality then, and he will at least learn a lesson of respect for the Old Testament that he is not likely soon to forget.

4. No less than three of my correspondents have come to grief over that old stone of stumbling and rock of offence, the first chapter of Genesis. "Evolution" haunts them like a spectre. One of them refers to Professor Drummond's recent lectures on "The Ascent of Man,"¹ and asks how they are to be squared with the teaching of the Bible.

Well, it may not be out of place to remind ourselves that there are evolutionists who yet find nothing in their scientific faith to disturb their faith in Christ. Take Professor Drummond himself. His acceptance of evolution leaves little to be desired from the scientist's point of view, and yet he is even better known as a teacher of religion than as a professor of science. Dr. Dallinger, again, is at the same time a Methodist preacher and one of the most eminent of living microscopists. This is his confession of faith: "Some men," he says, "are deeply moved and endure a mental anguish by the possibility declared by modern science, that our proud human race in highest probability originated in the monera, and through the mollusca and the lower mammals pro-

¹ The reference was, I may say, not to the published volume, but to the brief reports that appeared in the *British Weekly*.

gressed upwards by great creative laws, operating through unmeasured forms, to a manlike form, a body created in this way, slowly, of the dust of the earth. This is not absolutely proven, but if ever the day shall dawn that it shall be so demonstrated to the ordinary mind that it shall be irresistible, it would leave unruffled my mental peace, and untarnished my view of the moral majesty of man."¹ Here then—to mention no more—are two distinguished thinkers, each of whom knows more about both science and religion than either I or my correspondents, and neither of whom finds any difficulty in holding to both. Should not a fact like this at least give us pause before we rush to the conclusion that science and the Bible are in hopeless antagonism?

The truth is, difficulties of the kind of which the letters before me speak arise from a misreading of Genesis i. It is judged from a wrong standpoint. If this chapter is meant as a strictly scientific reading of the facts of creation, then I admit frankly it is inaccurate: the parallel columns of the "reconcilers" I look upon with the eyes of a hardened sceptic. But ought we so to regard it? It is a well-known canon of criticism that to judge rightly of any work you must place yourself at the point of view of its author. You do not test the value of, say, a constitutional history of England by the accuracy of its geographical allusions or scriptural quotations. I

¹ Sermon on "Conscience," reported in *British Weekly Pulpit*.

suppose everybody knows George MacDonald's exquisite little poem "Baby"—

"Where did you come from, baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here.

Where did you get those eyes so blue?
Out of the sky as I came through.

Where did you get that little tear?
I found it waiting when I got here.

Where did you get this pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out to hear.

How did they all just come to be you?
God thought about me, and so I grew."¹

For its purpose could anything be more perfect? But what should we think if, on the one hand, some dunderheaded pedant, concerned for Dr. MacDonald's reputation for accuracy, were gravely to insist on taking it all as serious science, or if, on the other hand, a governess who had passed an examination in Huxley's *Elementary Lessons in Physiology*, should really treat the poem so, and on that ground protest against its admission into the nursery?² Criticism that ignores the writer's point of view is worse than idle.

The same principle must be kept in mind in reading the first chapter of Genesis. Remember the story of the beginning of things may be told

¹ Some only of the verses are here quoted.

² This is an illustration of Professor Drummond's, which I read some years ago in the *Nineteenth Century*, about the time of Gladstone and Huxley's famous duel; but as I am writing out of reach of any public library, I have no means of verifying my reference.

from two different standpoints. We know how modern science would tell it: the grievous error we make is in supposing that this ancient chronicler is vainly trying to accomplish the same task. But surely his point of view is the point of view of the whole Bible, not scientific but religious. That purpose is stamped on almost every verse of the whole chapter.¹ It matters but little to this writer whether the birds or fishes come first in the scale of creation; it matters everything that his readers see behind and above all, *God*. "And God said"—let the intermediary stages be as many as they may, you come to that at last. Let science take all the æons of time it needs for the great creative processes it is slowly unravelling before our eyes; let it go on adding link after link to the mighty chain of created being; sooner or later the question must be asked, "On what shall we hang the last?" and when that question is asked, the wise man and the little child will go back together to the Bible to read over again the old words past which no science ever takes us, so simple and yet so sublime—"In the beginning, *GOD*."

II

Now, let me ask, suppose your difficulties remain unsolved—what then? One of my correspondents says he must sever his connection with

¹ I specially commend in this connection the first chapter of the late Dr. S. Cox's *Miracles: an Argument and a Challenge*.

Christ's Church ; another says he must continue to remain without it. It is not necessary to do either.

Some time ago I received a letter from an eminent Biblical scholar in reply to a query which I had addressed to him. It gave me the information I sought, but through the indistinctness of the handwriting one sentence remains to this day only partially deciphered. Do you suppose I threw the letter into the fire because of that one obscurity? Some day, perhaps, I may clear it up ; but in the meantime I have all I asked for and all I need. Is it not possible to treat the Bible in the same way? Granted that in parts it is of doubtful meaning, even wholly unintelligible, are we therefore to reject what in it we have found or may find to be both true and helpful? That there are parts difficult to be understood every one will frankly admit. And it is really not of vital importance what opinion we form with regard to them. The fact is, we are all in danger of attaching wholly unreal values to the opinions we hold on certain questions associated with the Bible. Do you really think, *e.g.*, that it is a matter of supreme concern to the Almighty which particular interpretation out of the many that have been suggested you choose to put upon the first chapter of Genesis? But, on the other hand, there is no mistaking the great Gospel which the Bible exists to proclaim. If you come to it for science or history, you will soon be asking more questions than it can answer ; but if you want to know how to live

a clean, sweet, pure life, it will tell you in language which he that runs may read.

"Then is the Bible an infallible book?" But what sort of infallibility do you want—a little peddling infallibility that dots all its i's and crosses all its t's, and makes up its figures correctly, the infallibility of the gazetteer and the ready reckoner—is that what you want? Then you do not need to come to the Bible for it. But if what you want is moral infallibility, a guide who will stand at the cross-roads of life and say to the bewildered pilgrim, "This is the way, walk ye in it," here is one who never sent a traveller on the wrong track yet. That is the Scripture's claim for itself: it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." About any other kind of infallibility it is silent.

"But," argues some one, "if we cannot be sure of the one how can we be of the other?" The answer is simple—try for yourselves and see. But can there be any possible doubt as to the rightness and goodness of that life which the Bible offers us and to which it calls us? There are some remarkable admissions in these letters: one writer says he has no doubts about Christ; another is quite satisfied that the world has not and never had any teaching worthy to be compared with His; while a third who murmurs at the shortcomings of religious professors says that many are "far from what a Christian ought to be." How much is involved in that last phrase! For, tell me, why

“ought” a Christian to be so different from the rest of people? Why do you expect from him what you never expect from others? Do you not see that language like this pays unconscious homage to the loftiness and greatness of the moral ideal which is set up by Christ? Then why not let Genesis alone and begin there? Whatever else is uncertain, it must be right to follow Christ.

Scores of young men begin to read their Bible at the wrong place. The first thing to settle is not the interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis, but our relation to Jesus Christ. Never mind how sin came into the world; it is here—the Bible did not make it—and it is doing the devil’s work in our lives. Christ assures us He can put right what is wrong. The testimony of multitudes, living and dead, confirms what He declares. Why, in God’s name, why will we deny ourselves the good that Christ offers us, because, forsooth, there are things in Genesis we do not understand?

I do not mean that these questions are of no importance, that it matters not how we think about them. But what I do want to urge upon you is—do not for their sake postpone what is of far greater moment. Let it be first things first. And these certainly are not among the first things; they can afford to wait. But that which cannot afford to wait, that which has waited too long already, is your decision to yield yourself to Christ as His servant. Delay no longer, I beseech you, but this moment answer to His call and follow in His footsteps.

THE WORSHIP OF THE HIGHEST

"Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee."—DEUT. xii. 13, 14.

XV

THE WORSHIP OF THE HIGHEST

I SUPPOSE that is a text on which modern Old Testament criticism could readily preach to us a long and learned sermon. Yet most of you would probably not care to listen to it; certainly I am not the man to preach it. Fortunately for both of us it is not necessary. We may learn the deeper, larger lessons that lie beneath the letter of Scripture, even though we have no power (and therefore no right) to judge of the difficult and delicate questions raised by literary and historical criticism.

To whatever period of the history of the people of Israel this command may belong, its meaning is obvious enough. Local sanctuaries, so liable to abuse, were to be abolished: "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest." And in their place the one central sanctuary was to be established: "In the place which the Lord shall choose, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings."

But what is all this to us? What sort of connection is there between our life to-day and this antiquated law of sacrifice? What have we to do with sanctuaries local and sanctuaries central—we who have learned that “God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth”? I turn for my answer to that remarkable writer whose abiding worth the reading world is slowly beginning to recognise, Mark Rutherford. It was from this text that Zachariah Coleman heard old Mr. Bradshaw preach in the Pike Street Chapel in the story of “The Revolution in Tahnner’s Lane.” “What a word it is!” said the preacher. “You and I are not idolaters, and there is no danger of our being so. For you and me this is not a warning against idolatry. What is it for us then? Reserve yourself; discriminate in your worship. . . . *for the place which the Lord shall choose*, that is to say, keep your worship for the Highest. Do not squander yourself, but, on the other hand, before the shrine of the Lord offer all your love and adoration.”

Here, then, is the principle that I wish to illustrate and to enforce. Every wayside has its altar, its eager priests, its worshipping crowds: “take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest.” Make your worship worthy of yourself. Do not waste yourself on trifles. When you give of your best, let it be for the sake of the best.

Seek, I say, after the *best things*. And I will have no niggard's interpretation of the phrase. "All things are yours"; no man shall narrow for me the magnificent breadth of that great saying, "Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, think on these things." The joys of physical and intellectual discipline, the delights of travel, of music, of painting, of books,—they are all part of the great Christian heritage; take them to sweeten and gladden your lives. "All these things,"—meat and drink and clothing,—said Jesus, "shall be added unto you." And surely He who withholdeth not these things will freely grant unto us those greater gifts which minister to our higher and spiritual life?

Yes, the commandment is exceeding broad; but, mark, it is a commandment, and it is at our peril that we disregard it. The penalty of disobedience is writ large in many a man's life. Here is a familiar picture: a man who, somehow or other, has always come short of what has been rightly looked for from him. His life all through has been one long unfulfilled prophecy. There is no kind of proportion in him between power and performance. He has been busy carving cherry-stones when he might have been moving mountains. It is as if a steam-hammer should be used to crack nuts. Not that he is a bad man. His life is not nasty or corrupt. We do not want to call down fire from heaven to consume him. Yet all his life has been a mistake, a colossal blunder, and when the end comes, man as well as God

will write his epitaph, "Thou fool!" What is the explanation? He has failed to discriminate. He has squandered himself on trifles. "The straws, the small sticks, and the dust of the floor,"

—he has lived among these, till the muckrake is more to him than the crown. True, he may never have bowed the knee to the god of uncleanness, or violated one of the common decencies of life, but the *accout* of life all through has been on the wrong things, "the unnecessary things," as Marcus Aurelius calls them. He has worshipped at any chance altar, not at the place which the Lord did choose.

The general principle is now, I think, quite clear. Let us lay it alongside our life and apply it at one or two points.

1. Take the question of *reading*. And here the application of our principle means this—read the best books. There are few important matters about which we are so careless as the choice of our books. Many of us have but a very little time that can be given to reading, at most, perhaps, a few hours a week, and yet the most trivial circumstance is often enough to determine which books we shall read: we read a book because it is new, or because the title catches our fancy, or because the newspapers have been talking about it, or perhaps because somebody offered to lend it to us. We boast that we are "the heirs of all the ages," and then we turn to the waste-paper basket of literature, or to the "troughs of Zolaism."

A great writer used to say she did not want the broth of literature when she could have the soup. What have you to do with Rider Haggards or Miss Braddons when you don't know your Walter Scott or George Eliot? Let the *Heavenly Twins* and the *Yellow Asters* wait till you know *Old Mortality* by heart, till you have laughed and cried over *Silas Marner*. Do not let the literature of the hour crowd out the literature of the ages. "Take heed to thyself . . ." But, says some one, is it not very largely a matter of taste? Undoubtedly; but in this, as in other things, taste can be cultivated or it can be ruined; and you have only to feed long enough on the highly-seasoned garbage that some writers of the day are serving up under the name of literature to destroy for ever your appetite for what is healthy and good.

2. Turn to another and most important subject—*amusements*. And the question just now is not so much what forms of amusements are admissible and what are inadmissible; rather it is, What place ought amusement to have in our life? It is here that the "discrimination" of which I have spoken is so sorely needed to-day. That amusement has *a* place in every young man's life I shall not stay to prove, because I do not suppose any one seriously questions it. But when you ask "What place?" you raise one of the knottiest practical problems that any of us has to solve. I am not so foolish as to suppose

that I can settle the question in a sentence, but this word let me say—it is not here that the emphasis of life must lie.

Athletics are a good thing, but if to you they are becoming the supreme thing, then for you they are no longer good, but bad and dangerous. Love of sport in every young life is natural and healthy; but if your love of sport means that your life is being turned into a huge playground, wherein the chief end of man is to make records and to break them, if to you all the world's a football-field, and all the men and women merely "players," then your love of sport is a passion which you cherish at the peril of your own undoing. I do not want to "scream" nor to exaggerate; I am ready to go farther than most, perhaps, on the side of toleration; no young man loves his favourite game more keenly than I do mine; but I say deliberately—and remember I am not speaking on behalf of a "set of young square-toes, who wear long-fingered black gloves and talk with a snuffle," but in the name of young men who believe that life was meant for something more serious than the kicking of a football, or the riding of a cycle, and I say—that the wild, feverish, all-absorbing excitement, sometimes well-nigh bordering on madness, which during the football season in some parts of our country is paralysing all the higher activities of tens of thousands of young men, is fast making of a once innocent pastime an evil that will have

to be shunned like opium-smoking or dram-drinking.

Recreation has its place ; take care that it gets no more than its place. Never must it become the ruling passion. Let us keep it at our feet, our servant but never our master, and it will bless us ; on the throne, it will spread mental and moral anarchy through all our life. Recreation is like medicine. Take it in right measure and it is a good tonic ; take too much and it becomes a poison. But if you ask me how much *you* may safely take, I cannot tell you. Different people require different doses. It is a case of every man his own doctor. You must watch yourself and keep your finger on your own pulse, and ask yourself how much of this is good for you, and settle it on that ground in God's sight.

3. I take one other application of the principle we are considering, viz. to the pursuit of *wealth*. And here, perhaps, the main element in the problem is not wholly dissimilar from that we have just been discussing. The pursuit of wealth, like the pursuit of pleasure, must have its place in every man's life. Christianity preaches no impossible doctrine of absolute indifference to the things of the life that now is. Always be suspicious of any representations of religion that make it visionary, unreal, unworkable. I certainly will not repeat the wild and foolish things that have sometimes been said against the possession of wealth. I would rather quote Mr. Barrie's beautiful words : " Let

us no longer cheat our consciences by talking of filthy lucre. Money may be always a beautiful thing. It is we who make it grimy."

No ; we are not wrong in giving to wealth its place in our life ; we are wrong, utterly wrong, when that place is the first place. The mistake lies, not in caring for it, but in caring for it supremely. To make haste to be rich is a temptation the most seductive and pitiless this generation knows. All around us noble natures are being smitten down every day, blighted and withered by "the narrowing lust of gold." What is the terrible gambling mania of our time but just one of the "foolish and hurtful lusts" into which men fall who *will* be rich? "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully"—and after that he could think about nothing but barns. Are you that man? Hold a copper coin near enough to your eye and it will shut out the whole heavens from your vision. Is that what you are doing? Take heed, my brother, as George Herbert says,—

"Lest gaining gain on thee, and make thee dim
To all things else. 'Wealth is the devil's conjurer,
Whom, when he thinks he hath, the devil hath him.
Gold thou mayest safely touch : but if it stick
Unto thy hands, it woundeth to the quick."

Not here, at the altar of Mammon, is the place which the Lord hath chosen ; not here must thy worship be offered.

If we do not obey this Divine law, what? If we neglect it, not in these things that I have named only, but habitually, systematically, what will the consequence be? What will the consequence be?—ah! how we shirk that question! How we refuse to answer it, refuse even to ask it! We think much of to-day, little of to-morrow, and nothing at all of the day after. We will not look at life whole. We must have the present pleasure; the palate must be tickled now; and so the mess of pottage buys the birthright, because the one can be had to-day and the other must be waited for. “*At the last . . . !*” says the warning voice; but we will not heed, we do not care. The cup is sweet to the taste now; sufficient unto the day is the enjoyment thereof; to-morrow may take thought for the things of itself. There is nothing that some of us need so much as to pull ourselves up sharp, and with both eyes fixed on our life, to ask, What is to be the end of all this?

Therefore I ask, What will be the consequence of neglecting this Divine law? Let us turn to Mark Rutherford again for the answer: “You will not be struck dead, nor excommunicated, you will be simply *disappointed*. Your burnt offering will receive no answer; you will not be blessed through it; you will come to see that you have been pouring forth your treasure, and something worse, your heart’s blood—not the blood of cattle—before that which is no God, a nothing, in fact. ‘Vanity of vanities,’ you will cry, ‘all is vanity.’”

You remember that saying of the Apostle John, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Then he tells us why we should not love the world. He does not say it is bad, but simply "it passeth away"; it is going; it will not last.¹ But surely man's true wisdom is to see that his life is rooted in the things which, like himself, will abide. You, my brother, what are you living for? Is it for the things that will last, or for the things that are passing away?

What are the things that abide? "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Then is all going? Will nothing last? Listen. "Love never faileth." Love, goodness, character—these are the things that abide for ever. "Believest thou this?" In a day like ours, when men speak of the religion of art, or science, or literature, it is not easy always to remember—nay, it is very easy to forget—that after all these are not the supreme things. Some of you who listen to me now² are just entering with me on another—the seventh—year of my ministry in your midst. The years that lie behind us have brought to us all more than once we dare ever have hoped; and yet for myself, at least, I would write failure, ay, and something worse than failure, across them all, did I not believe that they had taught, at least

¹ See Professor Drummond's *Greatest Thing in the World*.

² August 1894.

to some of us, that there is a something outside and beyond the dazzling glories of our modern life which is great not only as they are great, but great with a greatness all its own,—I mean, *goodness*.

That is as far as this Old Testament law will carry us. Yet I cannot stop there. I am not a preacher of morality only, but a preacher of the Christian Gospel. If we say that the emphasis of our life must be on righteousness, goodness, to what does that lead us? Goodness for us means Christlikeness; the one is an abstraction, the other its concrete expression. To be like Christ is our definition of being good; for we do not know, and the world does not know, any goodness like His.

And so we are back once more at the old, all-important question, How shall I make that goodness mine? How can I, the sinful man, grow like the sinless Christ?

Mr. Matthew Arnold, in his delightful essay on Marcus Aurelius, writes of the great Roman moralist in terms of the loftiest admiration. He calls him "perhaps the most beautiful figure in history," "the unique, the incomparable Marcus Aurelius." And yet he is bound to confess that his moral precepts are not for the "ordinary man." It is impossible, he says, to rise from the study of them "without feeling that the burden laid upon man is well-nigh greater than he can bear." "The word *ineffectual* rises to one's mind; Marcus

Aurelius saved his own soul by his righteousness, and he could do no more." And yet, surely, this is just what is demanded of ethical systems, that they be practicable, workable. Herein lies the glory of Christianity—its high ideals are possible. You *can* be what Christ bids you be, shows you you ought to be. There is not only high morality here, there is moral dynamic to make the morality operative.

The secret of it all is our relation to Jesus Christ. That which among the early Christians made likeness to Christ first a possibility and afterwards a fact was their personal devotion to Him. It is not enough that we admire and reverence Him. That may carry us a little way: **it can never carry us all the way; it can never make us truly Christians.** Oh! let us follow Him, let us bow to Him, let us trust in Him with all our hearts, and He will make all good things to live and grow in us.

A SAVED SOUL AND A LOST LIFE

"And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And He said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."—LUKE xxiii. 42, 43.

XVI

A SAVED SOUL AND A LOST LIFE

THIS beautiful incident in the story of our Lord's Death and Passion is familiar to us all. It is needless to spend one moment in painting again a picture every detail of which we already know so well.

The story brings to us a twofold message. I see in it the beckoning finger of encouragement; I see in it also the uplifted finger of warning. Christ is able and willing to save all; and if only we are willing, we are not too bad and it is never too late. Death's icy finger was already on this man's heart—another moment and it would be still for ever; but the nailed hands of Christ snatched his soul from the very mouth of hell.¹ There is the encouragement. The penitent robber was saved, yet "so as by fire"; behind lay his life a blackened, smoking waste. There is the warning. His soul was saved but his life was lost; Christ seeks to save both our soul and our

¹ See Bishop Hall's *Contemplations*.

life. Let us look at these two points in turn for a moment.

1. *The Encouragement.*—Exactly what this penitent robber knew of Christ we do not know ; at most it could be but little. It is true he calls Him "Lord," and speaks of His "kingdom." There is something, too, almost sublime in the faith which at that moment, when on the one side there stood a world leering, scoffing, hateful, and on the other but a lone, unfriended Man, could yet choose with Him, and cry, "This Man hath done nothing amiss." He saw the Lord in the Victim, the kingdom beyond the Cross. Still, when all is said, his thoughts of Christ must have been very inadequate, very unworthy. And yet, though he knew not even what he said, and though his prayer dropped from lips already white with death, Christ heard and saved him : "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

To all God offers to forgive the sin of the past and to give strength for the future ; and He offers to do it now. Is there any thought of Him in your hearts that will not let you believe that ? Again and again have I talked with men and women—even young men and women—who had brooded over this black thought till it had driven them well-nigh to despair : "I am too bad—I have sinned too deeply—I have gone too far—God's mercy is not for me." Is there any one listening to me now who feels like that ? Then may God help me to bring to you a word of

hope. "Late, late, so late"—yes, but if only we *will* it is not "too late." There is a popular hymn in many of our hymn-books called "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." I can sing it all except the last verse; when we get to that I am always silent—

"But if you still His call refuse,
And all His wondrous love abuse,
Soon will He sadly from you turn,
Your bitter prayer for pardon spurn:
'Too late! too late!' will be the cry—
Jesus of Nazareth *has passed by!*"

I cannot sing that. Christ never spurns a true cry for pardon. If He did that He would no longer be the Christ I know and preach. The only unpardoned ones at the last will be those who do not ask for pardon, who do not want it, who will not have it. "The only unpardonable sin is the sin of refusing the pardon that avails for all sin."¹ "*This* is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." But if we turn to the light, and welcome it, then are we condemned no longer. "Your bitter prayer for pardon spurn"? No; what I fear is not lest a day should come when Christ will be deaf, but a day when you will be dumb; not that He will say "No" to your prayer, but that you will not care to pray. I tremble when I think what strange work sin may work in a man's heart; but

¹ Dr. Maclaren.

God's mercy I never doubt ; it "endureth for ever" ; it will hold out while yet there is a single prodigal ready to cry, "I will arise and go to my Father."

This is the first truth I wish to emphasize ; and in order the better to do so, let me examine briefly two or three passages of Scripture which men and women have often wrested to their own hurt ; for still, as Margaret Elginbrod, in George MacDonald's beautiful story, says, "We turn God's words against Himself."

Take, first, the oft-quoted passage from the book of Genesis : "My spirit shall not always strive with man."¹ Who has not heard this used as an authority for the statement that a time comes when God withdraws His Spirit from men's hearts and ceases to seek to win them to Himself ? What are the real facts ? First, "My spirit" does not and cannot mean the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Trinity ;² secondly, "strive" is a complete mistranslation ;³ and, thirdly, the whole passage, however we translate it, has absolutely nothing whatever to do with the subject under

¹ vi. 3.

² The R.V. has done something to prevent the repetition of this mistake in the future, by spelling "spirit" with a small initial s. "It is not the Holy Spirit and His office of chastisement which is here meant, but, the object of the resolution being the destruction or shortening of physical life, the breath of life by which men are animated (ii. 7), and which, by reason of its Divine origin and kinship with the Divine nature, or even as merely a Divine gift, is called 'my spirit' by God" (Delitzsch).

³ "Act in" (Delitzsch), "rule in" (R.V. marg.)

discussion. The probable meaning is, as Dr. Dods expresses it, "The vital principle communicated to man by God (ii. 7) shall not animate him for ever, for he also (like the other creatures) is flesh"; "yet," so continues the narrative, "shall his days be a hundred and twenty years." Any one who will take the trouble to read the passage for himself as it stands in the context will realise in a moment the utter impossibility of the popular rendering.

Another passage sometimes quoted in a similar connection is this: "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone"¹—meaning he is past hope, it is useless to attempt anything more, therefore "let him alone." But is it so certain that this is the true interpretation of the passage? "Ephraim" stands here for Northern Israel. Hosea is addressing himself to the people of Judah, and he warns them against the idolatry into which their countrymen in the north have fallen. "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone"; *i.e.* be not a partaker with him in his evil-doings; "come ye out from among them and be ye separate." The words, then, are a call to separation addressed to Judah, rather than a judgment of doom pronounced against Israel.²

¹ Hos. iv. 17.

² This interpretation is defended, among modern expositors, by a scholar at once so orthodox and so able as Dr. Maclaren. "There are no people," he adds, "about whom God says that they are so wedded to their sins that it is useless to try to do anything with them."

But much more perplexing than either of these is the hard saying of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews concerning Esau: "For ye know" (I quote from the A.V.) "how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."¹ Readers of John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* will remember how his soul was tortured by doubts born of these dark, mysterious words; and not a few perhaps since then have passed through a like experience. And no wonder; for here in God's own Book are words that seem to say to us that a man may seek to repent, seek earnestly and with tears, and yet be rejected. Is it really so? Let us see. The grammatical construction of this verse is a little difficult. In all probability, when the writer says "he sought it diligently with tears," the "it" does not refer (as in the A.V. it seems to do) to the "place of repentance," but to the "blessing." That is the view adopted by the Revisers, who have placed the sentence "for he found no place of repentance" within parentheses, the result being to draw into closer connection the first and last clauses of the verse. So that what this passage tells us is really this: Esau despised and sold his birthright, afterwards desiring to inherit the blessing he sought it diligently and with tears, but was rejected. What, then, is the meaning of the parenthetical clause "he found no

¹ xii. 17.

place of repentance"? It is in that word repentance that the whole difficulty lies. Repent, in the high, religious sense of turning away from sin to God, Esau certainly did not; at least there is no mention of any such repentance in the Old Testament narrative, which must be our chief guide in the interpretation of these words. But repentance of another and lower kind was manifested by him. There was deep and bitter regret at his past folly; there was a real change of view with regard to the value of what he had lost, and there was an earnest desire to get it back again. And it is that change of mind, that repentance, of which the writer of this Epistle was thinking when he said that Esau "found no place of repentance"; that is to say, as one expositor has put it, "He found no field in which such repentance as he had could operate so as to undo what was past." Once the blessing might have been his, but he despised it; now it has passed to another. Esau may weep and wring his hands in the bitterness of his despair,—it is too late, the opportunity has gone for ever, and there is no place for repentance now. I do not know whether I have made my explanation clear; but at the risk of repeating myself, let me say again these words do not teach that a man may earnestly desire to turn away from his sin and seek after God, and yet be unable to do so. No such thought was in the writer's mind; it is not to be found in the Old Testament narrative on which he was commenting; and there is not a

vestige of any such doctrine in the whole Bible. What they do teach is this—and it is a truth sufficiently solemn and awful without magnifying into wholly unscriptural proportions—that if, like Esau, a man lets slip in early life the blessings God puts within his reach, he must not expect they will all come flocking back again the moment he finds out how he has played the fool and erred exceedingly.¹

One other passage and I pass on. In the Book of Proverbs we read: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh in the day of your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as a storm, and your calamity cometh on as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me diligently, but they shall not find me.”² These terrible words have been put, not infrequently, into the lips of Jesus; and because men have thought that *He* says, “They shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me diligently, but they shall not find me,” their

¹ Once more I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Maclaren. The brief exposition attempted above is in the main borrowed from a sermon of his which I read years ago. How closely I have followed him I cannot now say; the sermon has never, so far as I know, been reprinted.

² i. 24-28.

hearts have been filled with anguish and despair. A well-known minister (Dr. Monro Gibson), in an article on this passage in one of our theological monthlies,¹ mentions a very distressing case which had come under his own observation. An earnest Christian lady was visiting in one of our infirmaries. She found there an old man, broken-hearted because of sin, and anxiously seeking salvation. She told him of Jesus, the crucified One, who died that we might live. But he met her at every point with the one reply—the Gospel was not for him, his day of grace was past. When she quoted New Testament words of promise, he answered her with these words from the Book of Proverbs. Because Christ had once called and he had refused, now, said he, He will laugh at my calamity, He will be deaf to my prayer.

I have not time to deal with this passage as fully as I could wish. But this let me say: these words are not the words of Christ; the Book of Proverbs does not so much as hint that they are His in any sense; there is not even the shadow of a reason for putting them into His lips. They are the words of Wisdom, and so understood need no apology, for they present no difficulty. But who has a right to assume that Wisdom and Christ are one? Because to the late seeker Wisdom wears upon her brow a stern, forbidding look, does *Christ* therefore greet him with no gracious word of welcome? That some of the sayings of Wisdom

¹ *Expositor*, 3rd Series, vol. viii. p. 193.

may be fittingly put into His lips is nothing to the point. So may many of the Psalms: do we therefore make Him the spokesman of those terrible imprecations in which some of the Psalmists breathe out vengeance against their enemies? No, no; I tell you plainly, if I believed that God could ever laugh at my calamity, and mock the prayer that the consciousness of sin had wrung from a broken heart; if I thought that my cry for forgiveness could ever be met by Him with hard and stony indifference, I would shut to my Bible and never preach again. If that be God, there is no glad tidings of great joy for the world. But, blessed be His name, He has given to us a better Gospel than that. Drunkard and harlot, chiefest of sinners, vilest of the sinful race—let them all hear the great message of universal love. All His life Christ preached it; at the eleventh hour He saved the penitent robber; He put the trumpet to His lips, and shouted as with His dying breath His great evangel, "Whosoever will, let him come." Yes; though "this cursed hand were thicker than itself with brother's blood," there is "rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash it white as snow." "I would," says Christ, and if He does not, there is only one reason, and it is not in Him, "ye would not." Now, now, though it be the eleventh hour, though the candle of life have burnt to the socket, though you have nothing to offer God but the fragments that remain from a misspent life, yet even now if you *will* He will receive you,

and whatsoever of good His love can bring to
sinful men He will give to you.

2. We turn from the encouragement to the *warning*. "One was saved upon the cross," says an old divine, "that none might despair ; and only one that none might presume." But it is not of the folly of what we call "death-bed repentances" that I want to speak ; we did not need this narrative to teach us that, surely. Its warning rather lies in this : the robber's soul was saved, but *his life was lost*. But God seeks to save not only our soul, but our life—our days, our years, our strength for service. No one will think I am speaking lightly of the infinite blessing bestowed on that dying robber, but—I say it with all reverence—Christ can do better for a man than that. It is that better thing I desire for you young men. There is a touching little poem by Dora Greenwell,¹ suggested by the inscription on a tombstone in a country churchyard in Wales, which tells how he who lies below passed away at the age of eighty, and yet—referring to the date of his conversion to Christ—was only "four years old when he died"—

"If you ask me how long I have lived in the world, I'm old,
I'm very old ;
If you ask me how many years I've lived, it'll very soon be
told,
Past eighty years of age, yet only four years old."

¹ "A Good Confession."

How long are you going to be in the world before you begin to live? I want to tell you why you should come to Christ *now*.

It will save you from vain and bitter regrets in after life. You know what a "palimpsest" is. In early days, before the invention of printing, when books were both scarce and dear, a scribe who wished to make a copy of some writing would, not unfrequently, for the sake of economy, take a piece of parchment that had been already used; then when, as far as possible, the old writing had been erased, on the surface thus newly prepared he would begin his transcribing. But sometimes in the course of years, the work of erasure not having been done completely, the first writing would gradually reappear, with the curious result of a double inscription on the one sheet of parchment. Such a MS. is called a palimpsest.¹ Is not that a picture of some men's lives? To my mind there is nothing in Paul's letters so sad as the oft-repeated references to the terrible mistakes of his early life. Conversion cleansed the sheet, and we might have thought the past was blotted out for ever; and yet even when the end is almost in view, and Paul the Apostle has become "Paul the aged," he can still see the big, ugly words beneath the newer, fairer writing of his life—"blasphemer, persecutor, injurious." Is there anything so sad as the bitter memories of a good man? There are white-headed Christian men and women who

¹ Some of the Bible MSS. are of this character.

would give their right hand—all they have indeed—to stand again where some of you do. Oh! let us be wise in time. God can and will take back His penitent prodigal child, and give to him all that a Father's loving heart can bestow, but God cannot and God does not chase away the memories of the sinful past that tramp through the chambers of the mind. If you want no bitter thoughts of the far-off country with its riotous living and husks of the swine-trough, take care you do not wander from the Father's home.

And, further, I want you to come to Christ *now*, because, coming to Him, you will be saved for earnest service. "Repent ye, for—" any reason you like; any motive that really brings you to Christ is a good one; but the Baptist's plea is perhaps still the best; certainly it has lost none of its urgency to-day—"repent ye, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" New fields await the worker, new doors stand open on every side, a thousand voices summon us to that service of God which is the service of man. And I have no greater quarrel with sin than this, that it unfits men for this high service. We pity the unhappy cripple left behind in the race of life. But our churches are full of such—men and women repentant and forgiven indeed; but not for them the difficult task, not for them the high endeavour; they must go softly all their days. Just as a man dragged from the revolving wheels of some machinery may lose one of his limbs and yet may escape with his

life, so some are snatched from utter spiritual destruction ; but maimed and crippled for time, perhaps for eternity, they can never again be all that once they might have been. In some church-yard in Germany two tombstones stand side by side ; on the one it is written *Vergeben* "Forgiven," on the other *Vergebens* "In vain." If I had to write an epitaph for some, I think I would write both *Vergeben* and *Vergebens*.

My brother, will you win nothing better for yourself than that ? I appeal to your sense of honour. Play the man. If you honestly believe that religion is good for nothing, that it can do nothing for you and help you to do nothing for others, say so, and at least we shall know what we are about. If you never intend to be a Christian, admit it, and mad as I shall think your decision there will at least be some show of consistency in your conduct. But you intend nothing of the sort ; you believe there is very much in religion ; you fully purpose to be some day among the followers of Christ. Then is it just, is it honourable, is it manly, to treat this question as some of you are treating it ? Is there any other concern in life to which you present the same dallying, hesitating front you do to this ? Has it come to this, that every other creditor is to get twenty shillings in the pound, and God is to be put off with the sorriest pittance ? Is there to be enough and to spare for every other guest, and for Him only the crumbs that fall from the table, the mere

scrapings of the barrel? God asks your life while the bloom is on it; will you wait to give it Him till it is a poor, withered, shrivelled thing? He seeks you in your youth, in the very heyday of your life and vigour: will you seek Him only when, bankrupt of days and strength, you are scarce able to crawl back to His feet? "Are you afraid to die?" said a sick-visitor to a man as he lay on his death-bed. "No," said the dying man, "I am not *afraid*; I am *ashamed* to die: God has done so much for me, and I have done nothing for Him." Christ seeks your soul; He seeks your life: will you give Him both?

THE END

